The GREAT TREK

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Covered Wagon Babies

"California or Bust!" was the slogan of the Trail. Through song and tears—through privation and peril—through weary days and watchful nights—the companies of covered wagons wended their way slowly, but hopefully, on and on, toward the setting sun.

But not without a pause. Sometimes, wild storm or raging torrent stayed their course—sometimes, they paused to greet new life, and thus the Babes of the Trail were born.

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The Great Trek

THE GREAT TREK

By Owen Cochran Coy

Professor of History, University of Southern California; Director, California State Historical Association; author of "*Gold Days*," *etc.*

of the series
CALIFORNIA

Edited by
John Russell McCarthy

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
CHARLES FREMONT COY
A LOVER OF HISTORY
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

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PREFACE

There is no more interesting phenomenon in the history of this continent than the westward movement of the American people. The colonization of the new world by the Anglo-American did not stop with the Atlantic tidewater. Augmented by other peoples, this flow of population swept irresistibly westward across the Alleghenies and into the great Mississippi Valley where it was checked for a few decades by the barren nature of the Great Plains, until in 1848 the Mexican cession and the news of gold in California combined to burst the restraint of the frontier line, sending a mighty tidal wave of 'Forty-niners across mountains and deserts toward the Pacific. The purpose of this volume is to give the story of that great migration which was destined to revolutionize the history of California.

When planning this work the author was surprised to note the scarcity of printed books in the field. There are numerous volumes which deal with particular routes such as the Oregon and Santa Fé trails, and of individual travelers or groups, but our libraries are not supplied with works which treat as a whole the overland emigration at this most interesting epoch.

The plan of the author has been to give an account of this movement as nearly as possible in the words of contemporaneous writers. Where a single narrative would not suffice to indicate the variety of hardships encountered or the diversity of routes followed, the diaries of several travelers have been pieced together in a sort of literary mosaic, preserving for the reader as much of the original narratives as possible.

Believing strongly in the efficacy of maps as clarifiers of history, the author has prepared three maps to enable his

readers to follow the various trails, particularly where they were complicated and interwoven. The routes described in the text and all the important places mentioned are shown, and it is believed that the maps are themselves a contribution to the study of westward emigration.

The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to all who have contributed to this work. Interesting material has been gleaned from several noteworthy volumes now out of print and thus inaccessible to many readers. In addition to the older printed works, the author has fortunately had access to manuscript diaries which have made it possible to include valuable data hitherto unpublished. To the authorities of the Bancroft Library the author is obligated for opportunity to use extracts from the diaries and records of Kirkpatrick, Ashley and Hayes. The diary of Mrs. Helen Carpenter, in the State Library, was called to the writer's attention by Miss Eudora Garoutte. Jasper Hixson's journal was made available through the kindness of Mrs. Ada L. Baker and Mr. Ralph Heywood; Mr. R. P. McLaughlin is to be thanked for permission to use the original journal of Dr. Tompkins. The diary of Caspar S. Ricks was copied from the original owned by H. L. Ricks. The editorial staff of *Motor Land* and Mr. Mark H. Knight of the United Press Association have graciously permitted the use of extracts from the journal of John Wood. Further acknowledgments are made in the text and in the appended bibliography.

Dr. George P. Hammond has given valuable criticism during preparation of the work. The expert assistance of attendants at the Los Angeles Public Library and University of Southern California Library has been much appreciated. Gratitude is likewise due Miss Ethel Taylor for aid in compiling the bibliography and index.

OWEN C. COY

Franz Geritz

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THE GREAT TREK

INTRODUCTION

Westward the Star of Empire

MORE THAN a century ago a distinguished churchman, commenting on the westward movement of population in advance of civilization, voiced the now famous observation, "Westward the Star of Empire takes its course!" If Occidental civilization alone be considered, it must be admitted there is much of truth in this expression. Before the advent of the Christian era, Babylon, Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Rome each in turn became a great center of culture. Later came the rise of western Europe and, after a brief pause, the Age of Discovery pointed out a new western world. America, the Land of Opportunity, beckoned from across the sea, and during the sixteenth and succeeding centuries homes were sought within her bounds by an ever increasing number of people.

The motives giving impetus to this movement of population, which reached its American climax in the Great Trek to California, have been many. Ambition to arise above existing conditions, whether religious, social, economic or political, has often created a determination to leave the old conditions behind and to move on toward the setting sun. There unappropriated soil awaited the

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home seeker; there without the restraints of society one could worship and enjoy life with a freedom elsewhere impossible; there political institutions were still unformed and could be moulded to fulfill the needs and desires of the settlers.

The great lure of the American West was opportunity for individual advancement. Economic needs were, as ever, a controlling factor. The fur trade, mineral resources, fertile soil and opportunities for trade and commerce all conspired to draw men westward.

Social and religious motives also played an important part in the development of the West. The restraints of a stereotyped social order with fixed social classes and a more or less rigid religious system drove many to seek the freedom of a newer community.

Just as the Pilgrims sailed from Bristol to find a place where they might worship God free from the harassing regulations of the English king, so others in later years pushed westward to the American frontier and there established religious communities in which they sought to worship according to their own conception of what was right and proper. The migration of the followers of Joseph Smith to Independence and later to the Salt Lake Valley where the Mormon state was built, is one of the many examples which demonstrate the influence of the religious motive in the westward movement of the American people.

The spirit of missionary enterprise has also been significant. The task of converting the Indians appealed strongly to the robed missionaries of Spain and France who established missions throughout the interior of North and South America, for no people were too distant and no danger too great to quench the missionary ardor of the brothers of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic or the followers of Ignatius Loyola. The attitude of the Anglo-

Americans toward the native red man was from the beginning less friendly than that of the Spanish and French, and their missionary work less marked, yet the missionary motive was by no means absent among them. The story of Oregon might have had a far different telling had it not been for the influence of the Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries. The Far West thus owes more to religious influence than it has been wont to acknowledge.

Love of romance and adventure attracted many a man away from the settled area of the East to the frontier. An English visitor to California during the gold rush described well that restless spirit of the American pioneer which led to the westward movement, when he said that the western frontiersmen "are never satisfied if there is any white man between them and sundown!"

Seventeenth Century Beginnings

A brief resumé will call to mind some of the features of the advance from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi, a slow and sometimes difficult progress which prepared the way for The Great Trek to the Land of Gold. In the opening years of the seventeenth century the English settled upon the western shores of the Atlantic Ocean, on the banks of the James River in Virginia and at Plymouth Bay in New England. Soon other Englishmen came and the settlements were enlarged, but far to the west extended a virgin continent. Adventurous ones turned their faces westward and there, like the red man, lived upon the wild game and dressed in the skins of animals which were killed near at hand.

Not satisfied merely with the colonization of the Atlantic Coast, the Anglo-American frontiersman pushed westward into the foothills and the Piedmont area of the Allegheny Mountains. Trails into this region had been

opened by fur traders who had early sought out the Indian settlements for the purpose of commerce in furs. These trails were later followed by official explorers and later still by cattlemen. Wars with the Indians checked for a time the advance of the whites, but ultimately accelerated the westward expansion by calling attention to the desirability of the lands, which was made known to increasing numbers through the campaigns against the red men.

In 1635 New England began to expand into the interior through a grant made to several men who started the first inland settlement, at Concord. Already a fur-trading post had been established on the Connecticut River and soon the emigrants followed across the hills to this valley, founding numerous towns in the characteristic New England way. One instance of this is described by Lois K. Mathews: "The Pioneers of Windsor, by purchasing this right of settlement from the old Plymouth Company in England and from the Indians acquired the clear title, which was one of the dearest possessions of the New England farmer of that day, as it is of his descendants. One hundred in number, they made the overland journey of fourteen days; through swamp and forest following Indian trails, they moved as an organized church, taking their two reluctant ministers with them."

Likewise in the South, the Anglo-Americans were expanding into the western wilderness. Unlike that of the Spanish and the French, the progress of these people was slow but secure. Since they developed farms and advanced only when their position was fairly well established, their closely defined frontier moved forward year by year. For a generation after 1607, the whole of the Virginia settlement was beset by the troubles of pioneer conditions. Indian attacks menaced all settlers alike. In 1645 an Indian massacre under Opechancanough led to the erection of a

number of block houses or forts along the inland frontier. They were located at points on the various streams along the "Falls Line" where a change in topography caused rapids in the rivers and marked the head of tide water. Military posts at the falls of the James, the Appomattox, the Rappahannock and other streams became centers of the new society, and even when the frontier had passed on westward, still maintained their position as important centers, recognized under such names as Richmond, Petersburg, and Fredericksburg. Important among the commanders of these posts was Captain Abraham Wood of Fort Henry at the falls of the Appomattox. His success in the administration of his post gave it, as well as himself, a prominent position on the frontier and in connection with explorations into the unknown area beyond. From his fort two trading paths led into the interior, one southward to the Catawbas and beyond, the other westward to the upper Roanoke and through the Blue Ridge to New River. Before the middle of the century reports had reached the governor of Virginia regarding the great country beyond the mountains, its river system, the Gulf of Mexico and the red-capped Spaniards who had visited the country. It was at that time believed by many that "the Sea of China and the Indies" could be reached in ten days from the head of James River.

Expansion into the Piedmont

These new trails invited exploration, and Wood and others responded to their call. They led the way for settlers into the Piedmont area and through the mountains into the great Appalachian Valley. With forts to protect them from savage attacks the emigrants moved westward and formed the first truly American backwoods society. Removed from the tidewater area, these people supported themselves by trade with the Indians, by hunt-

ing, trapping, raising cattle, and by general farming. Further immigration led to wider exploration and the opening of still other western lands.

By the end of the seventeenth century most of the low lands along the coast were occupied from the boundary of Maine to South Carolina. Knowledge of the opportunities offered by the New World led to increased immigration and the back country began to be filled. The hills and valleys of New England, formerly the red man's hunting grounds, were turned into corn fields and meadows for lowing herds. In the Piedmont, along the South Alleghenies, a new race of people evolved, for English, German, Scotch-Irish, Swiss, French Huguenot, all attracted to the New World, took up abode here together.

The colonists making up the greater part of the movement were thus a mixture of racial elements and gave a distinction to the new western frontier. Predominantly Anglo-Saxon, with heavy strains of Teuton and Celt in the German and Scotch-Irish, these people made excellent colonists. The resourcefulness of the German and the fighting qualities of the Irish aided much in the struggle against frontier conditions and Indians.

The settlement of the Piedmont created a frontier quite different from earlier outposts, due to the conditions which have just been stated. Economic life here on the Indian-fighting, log-cabin frontier, was distinct from that of the older settlements, which had become somewhat removed from those raw conditions. New racial elements brought different political, religious and social ideals to be mingled with those of the Anglo-Saxon. Self reliance, individualism, democracy became prevailing characteristics forced upon the frontiersman in his fight for subsistence. Professor Frederick J. Turner in his essay on the Old West has called attention to the social and political forces that were generated in this Piedmont. He says:

"Among this moving mass, as it passed along the Valley into the Piedmont, in the middle of the eighteenth century, were Daniel Boone, John Sevier, James Robertson, and the ancestors of John C. Calhoun, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, James K. Polk, Sam Houston and Davy Crockett, while the father of Andrew Jackson came to the Carolina Piedmont at the same time from the coast. Recalling that Thomas Jefferson's home was on the frontier, at the edge of the Blue Ridge, we perceive that these names represent the militant expansive movement in American life. They foretell the settlement across the Alleghenies in Kentucky and Tennessee; the Louisiana Purchase, and Lewis and Clark's transcontinental exploration; the conquest of the Gulf Plains in the War of 1812-1815; the annexation of Texas; the acquisition of California and the Spanish Southwest. They represent, too, frontier democracy in its two aspects personified in Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. It was a democracy responsive to leadership, susceptible to waves of emotion, of a 'high, religious voltage'—quick and direct in action."

Expansion and Conflict

Seventeenth century beginnings prepared the way for wider expansion in the eighteenth century. The early English colonists had found themselves hemmed in by mountains and forests. The fur trade invited the coast settlers into the interior but in New England the proximity of the French in the St. Lawrence Valley checked expansion in this direction, while in the south the Blue Ridge formed another barrier.

These barriers to rapid expansion ultimately proved of benefit to the Englishmen, for while their French and Spanish opponents were scattering small settlements over great expanses of territory, the English were building

compact farming and commercial colonies. The great inter-colonial wars of the eighteenth century brought about the inevitable result of English expansion at the expense of the poorly established colonies of the rival nations.

The Alleghenies were, furthermore, a real barrier only in the earlier stages of colonization when they served as a protection for the infant colonies who needed isolation and opportunity to develop their own strength. Ways were soon found to pass around and through the mountains. The most natural route, which ran through the Mohawk depression out to the Great Lakes, was not used in the earlier period because of the hostile strength of the Iroquois Indians and the French foothold in the St. Lawrence region. But in the south it was early found that the mountains, instead of being a single barrier range, formed two ranges between which lay a great valley, and that this valley permitted access and egress by easy passes to the coast region on the east and to the great Mississippi Valley on the west. Less traversible but more direct routes led across the middle of the range from the Chesapeake to the head of the Ohio River, thus marking out a third line of westward expansion.

The southern trails leading southwest along the Great Appalachian Valley to the headwaters of the Tennessee River, were, as previously mentioned, the first to be used extensively by the emigrants through this mountain mass. Before the French and Indian War, Virginia had a settlement at Draper's Meadows, followed a little later by another at Redstone on the Monongahela. By 1758 there were numerous small groups of settlements on the Watauga, the Holston, and the Cheat rivers in eastern Tennessee. Here on the Watauga River in 1760 Daniel Boone is reported to have "cilled a bar" and during the

next five years hunters from the English settlements made their way annually beyond the western frontier.

The name of Daniel Boone has been connected in the popular mind with the pioneering of this trail and the beginning of colonization in the Old Southwest, an appellation early applied to the valley of Kentucky and Tennessee. With all due respect to the halo of glory which has been placed about the head of Daniel Boone, it should be pointed out that he was but one of a great multitude of men who were drawn by the irresistible pull of the Kentucky frontier. Boone was himself a typical frontiersman, one of the common people, at a time when the common people were making history. Fortunately for his fame, his name has been used to symbolize a movement and as such it has a real place in American history.

Boone's trail, known as the "Wilderness Road," led from the Appalachian Valley through the western Alleghenies at the Cumberland Gap. The full story of the "Winning of the West," as the late President Roosevelt chose to call the colonization of this country, does not come within the range of this volume. It is sufficient to note that the hardy frontiersmen pushed out along the Wilderness Road and other trails into the rich limestone country and there found excellent places for homes and farms. In this new country there arose communities which were subsequently to become Kentucky and Tennessee, and which although new states were to be received into the Union on an equality with the original thirteen.

The West and National Problems

Meanwhile there arose a strong demand for lands in the region northwest of the Ohio River. During the Revolutionary War the attempts to create a stronger central government had met opposition, a part of which was due to the fact that some of the larger states had great wealth in

western lands while others had little or none. The refusal of Maryland to sign the new compact of government led to the cession by the landholding states of nearly all of this western land, which thus became public domain.

In 1786 a group of men interested in land speculation approached the Continental Congress with a proposal to buy one million acres of this Federal land. Their action led directly to the adoption of a land act known as the Northwest Ordinance, which laid down a policy both for the sale of lands and for the formation of colonies or territories, and opened the way for the settlement of the Northwest Territory. There the Federal government kept a hand on matters as it had not done in the Kentucky and Tennessee country, and much was done for the settlers. The Indian frontier was adjusted by treaties and Federal troops helped to hold the red man in check. By 1800 the population of the area had increased to the point where division of the territory was feasible and the western part was detached as Indiana Territory. Three years later the old Northwest Territory became a state under the name Ohio.

This westward advance brought to the surface grave international difficulties. British fur traders were loath to yield the posts along the Great Lakes and hoped that England might once again acquire some of the territory ceded to the youthful republic. Spain likewise yearned to acquire a part of the territory recently ceded by England to the new states. She had been very reluctant to help in the cause of American independence and did so more to strike at her enemy England than to aid any revolutionary movement. France, too, looked with envious eyes upon the Mississippi Valley, for she remembered with chagrin the transfer of her beautiful colony to England and Spain in 1763, and hoped once more to gain possession.

Spain was an active offender, for she did not hesitate

to use her funds to influence American officials who might aid her cause, and furthermore, by her control of the mouth of the Mississippi River, she held a tight grip on the whole Mississippi Valley. Moreover, the western frontiersmen, separated from the Atlantic states by a mountain barrier, were at times not unwilling to entertain disloyal intercourse with these three powers.

Against such unfavorable conditions the new American administrations had to contend, but these troubles were slight compared to those which confronted President Jefferson when it was discovered that Napoleon Bonaparte had forced from Spain the cession of the western Mississippi Valley and that at his order the mouth of the river had been closed to American shipping. What the outcome might have been, the patriotic American dislikes to speculate. In this case, however, fortune favored the weak and the renewal of the European wars caused Napoleon not only to give up those plans which might have been disastrous to the American republic, but even led him to propose the sale of the vast area to the United States. The purchase of Louisiana in 1803 removed the difficulty regarding navigation of the Mississippi River, approximately doubled the area of the United States, and vastly increased her public domain.

With the admission of Ohio in 1803, the first state created entirely by Congress came into existence and an important step was thereby taken toward nationalization of our government. One thing significant in the enabling act was the provision that a portion of the revenue derived from the sale of public lands in the new state should be devoted to the building of a road across the mountains to the upper part of the Ohio River. By 1805 plans were made for building a road along the route used by General Braddock from Fort Cumberland on the Potomac to the Ohio. After much debate as to just where the road should

go, and further delay due to the War of 1812, the road was built and completed by sections during the years 1814 to 1818.

The Cumberland Road, as it was called, was a great boon to the Ohio Valley and immediately became a very popular highway for mails, freighters, home seekers or any who had occasion to make the journey between the Atlantic Coast and the Ohio Valley. There was likewise a demand for an extension of the road westward through the territory into what is now Indiana and Illinois. For many years the statesmen at Washington were confused regarding the constitutional right of Congress to build or even keep the road in repair, and it consequently suffered neglect. Meanwhile, along the Cumberland Road and down the Ohio River, a constant stream of emigrants poured into the Ohio Valley. In 1816 Indiana was admitted as a state, and two years later was followed by Illinois.

Occupation of the gulf area was hindered by the Indians who had engaged in agricultural pursuits. This region had no highway to correspond to the Cumberland Road, but by means of the Three Notch Road settlers were able to find their way from Hawkinsville on the Georgia frontier across to the Alabama River near the present site of Montgomery, and then on to the Mississippi River at Natchez. The increase in population and, more important still, the demands for new lands for cotton plantations led to expansion here as in the North. The military campaigns of Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812, and the later adjustment of the boundary disputes with Spain aided greatly the westward movement in the South. In 1812 Louisiana became a state, followed by Mississippi in 1817 and by Alabama in 1819. Meanwhile settlements were increasing in the central part of the valley around the confluence of the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi

rivers. Here fur traders, planters and small farmers gathered in a territory soon to become the State of Missouri, the admission of which brought violently to the fore the conflict between slavery and anti-slavery forces.

By 1820 the United States had at last reached its supposed territorial limits. The adjustment of the northern boundary in 1818, and that with Spain on the south the next year, seemed to afford the American people ample room for expansion. Thoughts of annexing Canada had subsided after the War of 1812, and the idea of "Manifest Destiny" which would annex the Mexican states had not yet evolved. Only the most optimistic stump speakers ventured to suggest that the day would come when the United States would extend beyond the Rocky Mountains. The great statesmen of the day and the various departments of government accepted this situation and began to adjust the nation's affairs accordingly

The Red Man's Domain

After two decades of exceedingly heavy westward migration, the frontier had in 1820 become stabilized along a line running from Lake Erie to the Gulf of Mexico. Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana were then frontier states.

There remained, however, the problem of the red man. The attitude of the Anglo-American toward him was such that the two races could not mingle without detriment to both. It therefore seemed wise and necessary to formulate some plan whereby the two races might, if possible, be separated. Exploration of the West suggested a possible solution. Major Stephen H. Long journeyed in 1819 over the Great Plains to the foot of the Rockies and came back with the report that this semi-arid region could be appropriately described as "A Great American Desert," for it was country which by nature could never be found

suitable to the agricultural needs of white settlers. If these observations were correct, then there had at last been discovered an area upon which the native American Indians might be placed with the assurance that the white settlers would leave them undisturbed!

Thus was evolved the idea of a great Indian reservation to include the area west of Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas. The government at Washington was well pleased with this proposed solution of a vexatious problem. The Indians east of the Mississippi River should be induced to accept permanent homes in the West, in lieu of their eastern holdings where they were being hard pressed by the whites. Treaties were made with the Indians pledging them the permanency of their new homes, and statutes were passed by Congress creating a bureau to give especial attention to Indian affairs and forbidding any white person to trespass on Indian Country without first having secured a license from the Indian Commissioner.

Fifteen years were required to carry through the negotiations for treaties with the Indians both west and east, but by 1840 even the more conservative of the tribes were induced to accept the new scheme and move out beyond the white man's frontier.

This policy had received the full approval of Congress and four presidents in succession and there seemed to be an agreement both as to the desirability and the effectiveness of the new policy. The War Department took up the matter of policing the frontier, and in 1837 the Secretary of War urged that "a chain of permanent fortresses" be erected along the frontier line. The Army was engaged in the survey of a military road to run along this line from Fort Snelling (Minneapolis), on the upper Mississippi west of Missouri and Arkansas, to the Red River. It was planned to erect stone fortresses along this frontier and to connect them with the Mississippi by railroads.

Checked by the Great American Desert and the Indian Country, the westward flow of population helped to fill the unoccupied areas of the Mississippi Valley. But even then movements were in operation which were destined ultimately to obliterate this frontier line, and yet again to crowd the native red man from his home. The astonishing story of that later advance, from the Mississippi across prairies, plains, mountains and deserts to California, forms the theme of the Great Trek.

Chapter I

CHAPTER I

With the Santa Fé Caravans

FROM THE TIME of the first settlement of the Mississippi Valley by the French in the eighteenth century there had been a strong desire on the part of western merchants to open up trade with the Spanish outpost in the upper Rio Grande Valley, but so long as Spain maintained her control over that land no commerce was permitted and the profit from illegal trade did not equal the risks involved. It was therefore not until the opening of the third decade of the nineteenth century that American traders were really able to carry on this traffic. Since Santa Fé was separated from the seaport at Vera Cruz by more than fifteen hundred miles, much of it difficult road, it can be seen that the shorter distance across the plains from the Missouri River offered an excellent opportunity for commerce, especially in those articles in which the Yankee manufacturers excelled.

In 1821 William Becknell, having heard of the success of the Mexican revolt against Spain, hastened with a stock of goods to Santa Fé. So successful was the scheme from a financial point of view that there was inaugurated the flourishing cross-country caravan business thenceforth called the Santa Fé Trade. The merchants who ventured into it soon worked out a definite system, setting out

each spring with wagon-loads of articles that would bring a profitable return when sold in New Mexico or the provinces farther south or west.

In this manner there was developed what was soon known as the Santa Fé Trail, leading from Independence on the western border of Missouri to Santa Fé in New Mexico. During the earlier years the trail led across the plains to the Bend of the Arkansas River and followed up that stream to Bent's Fort in the present State of Colorado, then turned south along the western side of Purgatoire Creek, which the frontiersmen pronounced "picket wire," through the Raton Mountains and thence around the base of the Sawatch Range to Las Vegas and Santa Fé.

A variation of the trail shortened the distance and later became much more popular, although lack of water discouraged its use except by wagon trains. This route crossed the Arkansas River at Cimarron Crossing, later Fort Dodge and Dodgeville, near the 100th meridian, and struck boldly across the High Plains to the Cimarron River and then along the headwaters of the branches of the Canadian and Pecos rivers to Las Vegas and Santa Fé. Inasmuch as the traders not only explored and beat down a distinct trail to the Southwest, but often became pioneer settlers in the Far West, it is important that we give place to the Santa Fé caravans in the consideration of the Great Trek.

Dr. Josiah Gregg, Trader and Author

It is of especial interest to readers of California history to know that the great historian of the Santa Fé trade was a man who became a California pioneer of the days of 'Forty-nine, and gave his life in an enterprise of exploration that found not only a shorter route from the Trinity River mines to the ocean, but also opened up the settlement of the Humboldt Bay region of California. This was

Dr. Josiah Gregg, well known as the author of *Commerce of the Prairies* which, because of the ability of the author both as an observer and as a writer, is recognized as the classic of the Santa Fé Trail. It is therefore fitting that the account of this movement be given largely in the words of Josiah Gregg describing his journey along the Santa Fé Trail in the spring of 1831. Gregg writes:

"People who reside at a distance, and especially at the North, have generally considered St. Louis as the emporium of the Santa Fé Trade; but that city, in truth, has never been a place of rendezvous, nor even of outfit, except for a small portion of the traders who have started from its immediate vicinity. The town of Franklin on the Missouri river, over a hundred and fifty miles further to the westward, seems truly to have been the cradle of our trade; and, in conjunction with several neighboring towns, continued for many years to furnish the greater number of these adventurous traders. Even subsequently to 1831, many wagons have been fitted out and started from this interior section. But as the navigation of the Missouri river had considerably advanced towards the year 1831, and the advantages of some point of debarkation nearer the western frontier were very evident, whereby upwards of a hundred miles of troublesome land-carriage, over unimproved and often miry roads, might be avoided, the new town of INDEPENDENCE, about twelve miles from the Indian border and two or three south of the Missouri river, being the most eligible point, soon began to take the lead as a place of debarkation, outfit and departure, which, in spite of all opposition, it has ever since maintained. It is to this beautiful spot, already grown up to be a thriving town, that the prairie adventurer, whether in search of wealth, health or amusement, is latterly in the habit of repairing, about the first of May, as the caravans usually set out sometime

during that month. Here they purchase their provisions for the road, and many of their mules, oxen, and even some of their wagons—in short, load all their vehicles, and make their final preparations for a long journey across the prairie wilderness.

"As Independence is a point of convenient access (the Missouri river being navigable at all times from March till November), it has become the general 'port of embarkation' for every part of the great western and northern 'prairie ocean.' Besides the Santa Fé caravans, most of the Rocky Mountain traders and trappers, as well as emigrants to Oregon, take this town in their route. During the season of departure, therefore, it is a place of much bustle and active business. . . ."

Council Grove

"It was on the 15th of May, 1831, and one of the brightest and most lovely of all the days in the calendar that our little party set out from Independence. The general rendezvous at Council Grove was our immediate destination. It is usual for the traders to travel thus far in detached parties, and to assemble there for the purpose of entering into some kind of organization, for mutual security and defence during the remainder of the journey. . . .

"Early on the 26th of May we reached the long looked-for rendezvous of Council Grove, where we joined the main body of the caravan. Lest this imposing title suggest to the reader a snug and thriving village, it should be observed, that, on the day of our departure from Independence, we passed the last human abode upon our route; therefore, from the borders of Missouri to those of New Mexico not even an Indian settlement greeted our eyes.

"This place is about a hundred and fifty miles from In-

dependence, and consists of a continuous stripe of timber nearly half a mile in width, comprising the richest varieties of trees; such as oak, walnut, ash, elm, hickory, etc., and extending all along the valleys of a small stream known as 'Council Grove creek,' the principal branch of the Neosho river. . . ."

As had become the custom of overland companies, a halt was made at Council Grove for the purpose of organizing the company for mutual protection of the members and their property during the journey through the Indian Country. A captain was chosen and the entire company separated into divisions. Opportunity was also improved to procure timbers for axle trees and other wagon parts, for no more timber trees would be found until the Rocky Mountains were reached near Santa Fé.

"Owing to the delays of organizing and other preparations, we did not leave the Council Grove camp till May 27th. Although the usual hour of starting with the prairie caravans is after an early breakfast, yet, on this occasion, we were hindered till in the afternoon. The familiar note of preparation, 'Catch up! catch up!' was now sounded from the captain's camp, and re-echoed from every division and scattered group along the valley. On such occasions, a scene of confusion ensues, which must be seen to be appreciated. The woods and dales resound with the gleeful yells of the light-hearted wagoners, who, weary of inaction, and filled with joy at the prospect of getting under way, become clamorous in the extreme. Scarcely does the jockey on the race-course ply his whip more promptly at that magic word 'Go,' than do these emulous wagoners fly to harnessing their mules at the spirit-stirring sound of 'Catch up.' Each teamster vies with his fellows who shall be soonest ready; and it is a matter of boastful pride to be the first to cry out—'All's set.'

"The uproarious bustle which follows—the hallooing of those in pursuit of animals—the exclamations which the unruly brutes call forth from their wrathful drivers; together with the clatter of bells—the rattle of yokes and harness—the jingle of chains—all conspire to produce an uproarious confusion, which would be altogether incomprehensible without the assistance of the eyes; while these alone would hardly suffice to unravel the labyrinthian manoeuvres and hurly-burly of this precipitate breaking up. . . .

"'All's set!' is finally heard from some teamster—'All's set,' is directly responded from every quarter. 'Stretch out!' immediately vociferates the captain. Then, the 'heps!' of drivers—the cracking of whips—the trampling of feet—the occasional creak of wheels—the rumbling of wagons—form a new scene of exquisite confusion, which I shall not attempt further to describe. 'Fall in!' is heard from headquarters, and the wagons are forthwith strung out upon the long inclined plain, which stretches to the heights beyond Council Grove.

"After fifteen miles' progress, we arrived at the 'Diamond Spring' (a crystal fountain discharging itself into a small brook), to which, in later years, caravans have sometimes advanced, before 'organizing.' Near twenty-five miles beyond we crossed the Cottonwood fork of the Neosho, a creek still smaller than that of Council Grove, and our camp was pitched immediately in its further valley.

"When caravans are able to cross in the evening, they seldom stop on the near side of a stream—first, because if it happen to rain during the night, it may become flooded, and cause both detention and trouble: again, though the stream be not impassable after rain, the banks become slippery and difficult to ascend. A third and still more important reason is, that, even supposing the contingency

Frans Gentz '29

of rain does not occur, teams will rarely pull as well in 'cold collars,' as wagoners term it—that is, when fresh geared—as in the progress of a day's travel. When a heavy pull is just at hand in the morning, wagoners sometimes resort to the expedient of driving a circuit upon the prairie, before venturing to 'take the bank.' . . .

"Our route lay through uninterrupted prairie for about forty miles—in fact I may say, for five hundred miles, excepting the very narrow fringes of timber along the borders of the streams. The antelope of the high prairies which we now occasionally saw, is sometimes found as far east as Council Grove; and as a few old buffaloes have sometimes been met with about Cottonwood, we now began to look out for this desirable game. . . ."

A Buffalo Hunt

"Our hopes of game were destined soon to be realized; for early on the second day after leaving Cottonwood (a few miles beyond the principal Turkey creek), our eyes were greeted with the sight of a herd amounting to nearly a hundred head of buffalo, quietly grazing in the distance before us. Half of our company had probably never seen a buffalo before (at least in its wild state); and the excitement that the first sight of these 'prairie beeves' occasions among a party of novices, beggars all description. Every horseman was off in a scamper; and some of the wagoners, leaving their teams to take care of themselves, seized their guns and joined the race afoot. Here went one with his rifle or yager—there another with his double-barrelled shot-gun—a third with his holster-pistols—a Mexican perhaps with his lance—another with his bow and arrows—and numbers joined without any arms whatever, merely for the 'pleasures of the chase'—all helter-skelter—a regular John Gilpin race, truly 'neck or naught.' The fleetest of the pursuers were soon in the midst of the game,

which scattered in all directions, like a flock of birds upon the descent of a hawk.

"A few 'beeves' were killed during the chase; and as soon as our camp was pitched, the bustle of kindling fires and preparing for supper commenced. The new adventurers were curious to taste this prairie luxury; while we all had been so long upon salt provisions—now nearly a month—that our appetites were in exquisite condition to relish fresh meat. The fires had scarcely been kindled when the fumes of broiling meat pervaded the surrounding atmosphere; while all huddled about, anxiously watching their cookeries, and regaling their senses in anticipation upon the savory odors which issued from them.

"Half a day's drive after leaving this camp . . . brought us to the valley of Arkansas river. This point is about 270 miles from Independence. From the adjacent heights the landscape presents an imposing and picturesque appearance. Beneath a ledge of wave-like yellow sandy ridges and hillocks spreading far beyond, descends the majestic river (averaging at least a quarter of a mile in width), bespeckled with verdant islets, thickly set with cottonwood timber. The banks are very low and barren, with the exception of an occasional grove of stunted trees, hiding behind a swamp or sand-hill, placed there as it were to protect it from the fire of the prairies, which in most parts keeps down every perennial growth. In many places, indeed, where there are no islands, the river is so entirely bare of trees, that the unthinking traveller might approach almost to its very brink, without suspecting its presence.

"Thus far, many of the prairies have a fine and productive appearance, though the Neosho river (or Council Grove) seems to form the western boundary of the truly rich and beautiful country of the border. Up to that point

the prairies are similar to those of Missouri—the soil equally exuberant and fertile; while all the country that lies beyond, is of a far more barren character—vegetation of every kind is more stinted—the gay flowers more scarce, and the scanty timber of a very inferior quality: indeed, the streams, from Council Grove westward, are lined with very little else than cottonwood, barely interspersed here and there with an occasional elm or hackberry. . . .

"Our route had already led us up the course of the Arkansas river for over a hundred miles, yet the earlier caravans often passed from fifty to a hundred further up before crossing the river; therefore nothing like a regular ford had ever been established. Nor was there a road, not even a trail anywhere across the famous plain, extending between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers, a distance of over fifty miles, which now lay before us—the scene of such frequent sufferings in former times for want of water. It having been determined upon, however, to strike across this dreaded desert the following morning, the whole party was busy in preparing for the 'water scrape,' as these droughty drives are very appropriately called by prairie travellers. This tract of country may truly be styled the grand 'prairie ocean'; for not a single landmark is to be seen for more than forty miles—scarcely a visible eminence by which to direct one's course. All is as level as the sea, and the compass was our surest, as well as principal guide. . . .

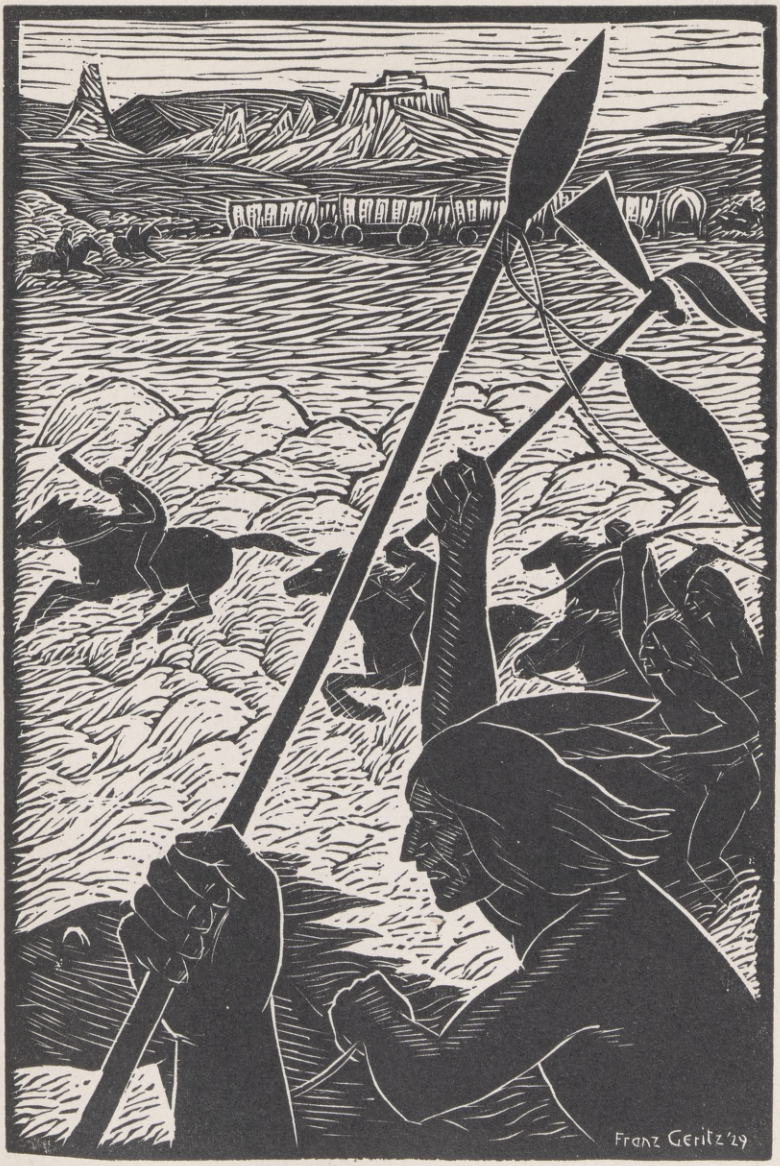
"The evening before the embarking of a caravan upon this plain, the captain's voice is usually heard above the din and clatter of the camp, ordering to 'fill up the water kegs,'—a precaution which cannot be repeated too often, as new adventurers are usually ignorant of the necessity of providing a supply sufficient to meet every contingency that may befal during two or more days' journey over this arid region. The cooks are equally engrossed by

their respective vocations: some are making bread, others preparing viands, and all tasking their ingenuity to lay by such stores as may be deemed expedient for at least two days' consumption. On the following morning (June 14th), the words 'catch up' again resounded through the camp, and the caravan was once more in motion. . . ."

An Indian Scare

"We now moved on slowly and leisurely, for all anxiety on the subject of water had been happily set at rest by frequent falls of rain. But imagine our consternation and dismay, when, upon descending into the valley of the Cimarron, on the morning of the 19th of June, a band of Indian warriors on horse-back suddenly appeared before us from behind the ravines—an imposing array of death-dealing savages! There was no merriment in this! It was a genuine alarm—a tangible reality! These warriors, however, as we soon discovered, were only the vanguard of a 'countless host,' who were by this time pouring over the opposite ridge, and galloping directly towards us.

"The wagons were soon irregularly 'formed' upon the hill-side: but in accordance with the habitual carelessness of caravan traders, a great portion of the men were unprepared for the emergency. Scores of guns were 'empty,' and as many more had been wetted by the recent showers, and would not 'go off.' Here was one calling for balls—another for powder—a third for flints. Exclamations, such as, 'I've broke my ramrod'—'I've split my caps'—'I've rammed down a ball without powder'—'My gun is choked; give me yours'—were heard from different quarters; while a timorous 'green-horn' would perhaps cry out, 'Here, take my gun, you can out-shoot me!' The more daring bolted off to encounter the enemy


Franz Geritz '29

at once, while the timid and cautious took a stand with presented rifle behind the wagons. . . .

"The entire number of the Indians, when collected together, could not have been less than from two to three thousand—although some of our company insisted that there were at least four thousand souls. In such a case they must have mustered nearly a thousand warriors, while we were but little over two hundred strong. Still, our superior arms and the protection afforded by the wagons, gave us considerably the advantage, even supposing an equality in point of valor. However, the appearance of the squaws and children soon convinced us, that, for the present, at least, they had no hostile intentions; so we also descended into the valley and formed our camp a few hundred yards below them. The 'capitanes,' or head men of the whites and Indians, shortly after met, and, again smoking the calumet, agreed to be friends."

Lost on the Great Plains

"Although we were now on the very banks of the Cimarron, even the most experienced traders of our party, whether through fright or ignorance, seemed utterly unconscious of the fact. Having made our descent, far below the usual point of approach, and there being not a drop of water found in the sandy bed of the river, it was mistaken for Sand creek, and we accordingly proceeded without noticing it. Therefore, after our 'big talk' was concluded, and dinner dispatched, we again set out southward, in search of the Cimarron. . . .

"After a few miles' travel we encountered a ledge of sand-hills, which obstructed our course, and forced us to turn westward and follow their border for the rest of the day. Finding but little water that night, and none at all the next day, we began by noon to be sadly frightened; for nothing is more alarming to the prairie traveller than

a 'water-scrape.' The impression soon became general that we were *lost*—lost on that inhospitable desert, which had been the theatre of so many former scenes of suffering! and our course impeded by sand-hills! A council of the veteran travellers was called to take our emergency into consideration. It was at once resolved to strike in a north-westerly direction in search of the 'dry ravine' we had left behind us, which was now supposed to have been the Cimarron.

"We had just set out, when a couple of Indians approached us, bringing the horse we had lost the night before; an apparent demonstration of good faith which could hardly have been anticipated. It was evidently an effort to ingratiate themselves in our favor, and establish an intercourse—perhaps a traffic. But the outrages upon Major Riley, as well as upon a caravan, not two years before, perpetrated probably by the same Indians, were fresh in the memory of all; so that none of us were willing to confide in their friendly professions. On inquiring by means of signs for the nearest water, they pointed to the direction we were travelling; and finally taking the lead, they led us, by the shortest way, to the valley of the long-sought Cimarron, which, with its delightful green-grass glades and flowing torrent (very different in appearance from where we had crossed it below), had all the aspect of an 'elysian vale,' compared with what we had seen for some time past. We pitched our camp in the valley, much rejoiced at having again 'made a port.' . . .

"After following the course of the Cimarron for two days longer, we at length reached a place called the 'Willow Bar,' where we took the usual mid-day respite of two or three hours, to afford the animals time to feed, and our cooks to prepare dinner. Our wagons were regularly 'formed,' and the animals turned loose to graze at leisure, with only a 'day-guard' to watch them. Those

who had finished their dinners lay stretched upon their blankets, and were just beginning to enjoy the luxury of a siesta—when all of a sudden, the fearful and oft-reiterated cry of 'Indians!' turned this scene of repose into one of bustle and confusion.

"From the opposite ridge at the distance of a mile, a swarm of savages were seen coming upon us, at full charge, and their hideous whoop and yell soon resounded through the valley. Such a jumbling of promiscuous voices I never expect to hear again. Every one fancied himself a commander, and vociferated his orders accordingly. The air was absolutely rent with the cries of 'Let's charge 'em, boys!'—'Fire upon 'em, boys!'—'Reserve! don't fire till they come nearer!'—while the voice of our captain was scarcely distinguishable in his attempts to prevent such rash proceedings. As the prairie Indians often approach their friends as well as enemies in this way, Captain Stanley was unwilling to proceed to extremities, lest they might be peacefully inclined. But a 'popping salute,' and the whizzing of fusil balls over our heads, soon explained their intentions. We returned them several rifle shots by way of compliment, but without effect, as they were at too great a distance.

"A dozen cannoniers now surrounded our 'artillery,' which was charged with canister. Each of them had, of course, something to say. 'Elevate her; she'll ground,' one would suggest. 'She'll overshoot, now,' rejoined another. At last, after raising and lowering the six-pounder several times, during which process the Indians had time to retreat beyond reach of shot, the match was finally applied, and—bang! went the gun, but the charge grounded midway. This was followed by two or three shots with single ball, but apparently without effect; although there were some with sharp eyes, who fancied they saw Indians or horses wounded at every fire. We

came off equally unscathed from the conflict, barring a horse of but little value, which ran away, and was taken by the enemy. The Indians were about a hundred in number, and supposed to be Comanches, though they might have been a band of warriors belonging to the party we had just left behind.

"The novices were not a little discouraged at these frequent inroads of the enemy, although it is very seldom that any lives are lost in encounters with them. In the course of twenty years since the commencement of this trade, I do not believe that there have been a dozen deaths upon the Santa Fé route, even including those who have been killed off by disease, as well as by the Indians. . . .

"It was on the last day of June that we arrived at the 'Upper Spring,' which is a small fountain breaking into a ravine that declines towards the Cimarron some three or four miles to the north. The scarcity of water in these desert regions, gives to every little spring an importance which, of course, in more favored countries it would not enjoy. We halted at noon on the brook below, and then branched off towards the waters of the Canadian, in an average direction of about thirty degrees south of west. . . .

"We had now a plain and perfectly distinguishable track before us, and a party of *avant-couriers*, known in the technical parlance of the Prairies as 'runners,' soon began to make preparations for pushing forward in advance of the caravan into Santa Fé, though we were yet more than two hundred miles from that city. It is customary for these runners to take their departure from the caravans in the night, in order to evade the vigilance of any enemy that might be lurking around the encampment. They are generally proprietors or agents; and their principal purpose is to procure and send back a supply of provisions, to secure good store-houses, and what is no

less important, to obtain an agreeable understanding with the officers of the custom-house. . . ."

Nearing Santa Fé

The caravan was then on the headwaters of the North Fork of the Canadian River in territory which is now a part of northeastern New Mexico. The route pursued followed a southwesterly course past "Rabbit Ear Mound," "Round Mound," and the "Point of Rocks" to the main branch of the Canadian River at "El Vado de Piedras" (Rocky Ford). Here the company was met by customs officers from Santa Fé with a military escort, and the caravan organization itself was abandoned. The narrative of Dr. Gregg continues as follows:

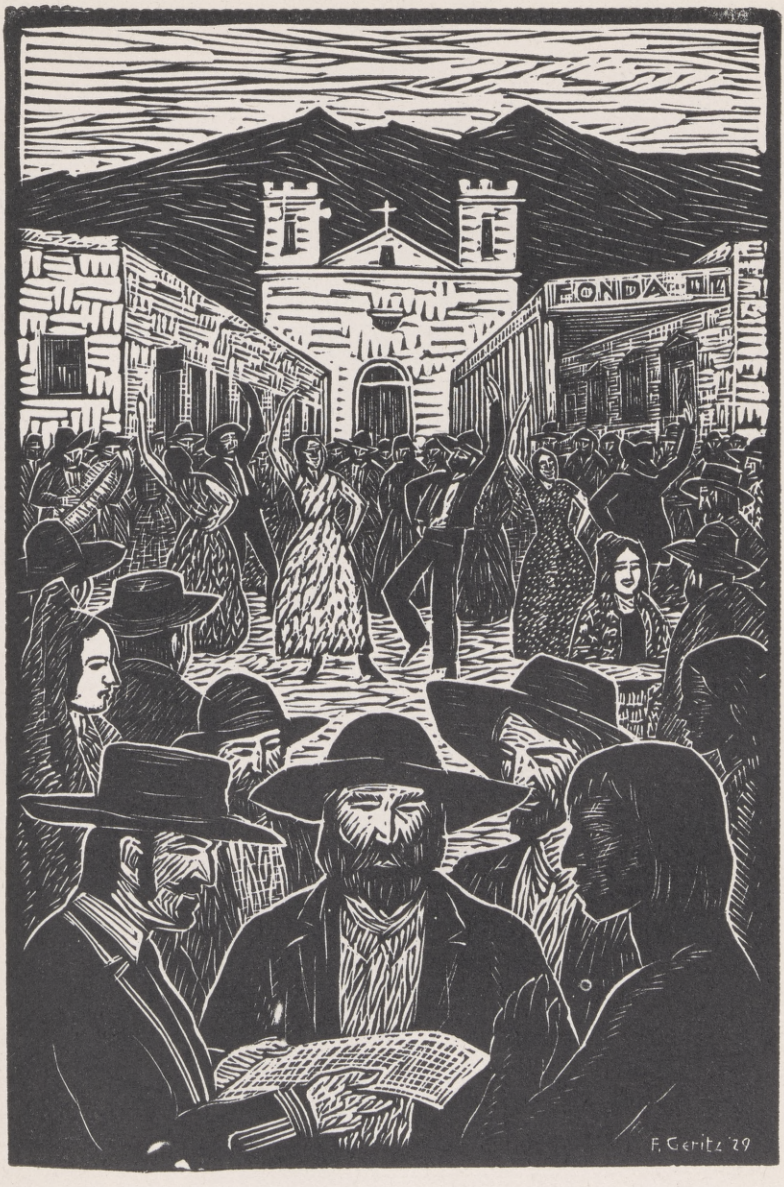
"Some distance beyond the Colorado [Canadian], a party of about a dozen (which I joined) left the wagons to go ahead to Santa Fé. Fifty miles beyond the main branch of this stream we passed the last of the Canadian waters, known to foreigners as the *Mora*. From thence to the *Gallinas*, the first of the Rio del Norte waters, the road stretches over an elevated plain, unobstructed by any mountainous ridge. . . .

"Some twenty miles from this place we entered San Miguel, the first settlement of any note upon our route. This consists of irregular clusters of mud-wall huts, and is situated in the fertile valley of Rio Pecos, a silvery little river which ripples from the snowy mountains of Santa Fé—from which city this frontier village is nearly fifty miles to the southeast. The road makes this great southern bend, to find a passway through the broken extremity of the spur of mountains before alluded to, which from this point south is cut up into detached ridges and table plains. This mountain section of the road, even in its present unimproved condition, presents but few difficult passes, and might, with little labor, be put in good order.

"A few miles before reaching the city, the road again emerges into an open plain. Ascending a table ridge, we spied in an extended valley to the northwest, occasional groups of trees, skirted with verdant corn and wheat fields, with here and there a square block-like protuberance reared in the midst. A little further, and just ahead of us to the north, irregular clusters of the same opened to our view. 'Oh, we are approaching the suburbs!' thought I, on perceiving the cornfields, and what I supposed to be brick-kilns scattered in every direction. These and other observations of the same nature becoming audible, a friend at my elbow said, 'It is true those are heaps of unburnt bricks, nevertheless they are *houses*—this is the city of SANTA FÉ.'

"Five or six days after our arrival, the caravan at last hove in sight, and wagon after wagon was seen pouring down the last declivity at about a mile distance from the city. To judge from the clamorous rejoicings of the men, and the state of agreeable excitement which the muleteers seemed to be laboring under, the spectacle must have been as new to them as it had been to me. It was truly a scene for the artist's pencil to revel in. Even the animals seemed to participate in the humor of their riders, who grew more and more merry and obstreperous as they descended towards the city. I doubt, in short, whether the first sight of the walls of Jerusalem were beheld by the crusaders with much more tumultuous and soul-enrapturing joy.

"The arrival produced a great deal of bustle and excitement among the natives. '*Los Americanos!*'—'*Los carros!*'—'*La entrada de la caravana!*' were to be heard in every direction; and crowds of women and boys flocked around to see the new-comers; while crowds of *léperos* hung about as usual to see what they could pilfer. The wagoners were by no means free from excitement on this occasion.


FONDA
F. Geritz '29

Informed of the 'ordeal' they had to pass, they had spent the previous morning in 'rubbing up;' and now they were prepared, with clean faces, sleek combed hair, and their choicest Sunday suit, to meet the 'fair eyes' of glistening black that were sure to stare at them as they passed. There was yet another preparation to be made in order to 'show off' to advantage. Each wagoner must tie a bran new 'cracker' to the lash of his whip; for, on driving through the streets and the *plaza publica*, every one strives to outvie his comrades in the dexterity with which he flourishes this favorite badge of his authority. . . .

"The arrival of a caravan at Santa Fé changes the aspect of the place at once. Instead of the idleness and stagnation which its streets exhibited before, one now sees everywhere the bustle, noise and activity of a lively market town."

The Santa Fé Trail, extending as it did from the Missouri frontier to New Mexico, is of especial significance in the story of the Great Trek. It opened a route of trade with inhabitants of Santa Fé and then was continued by the Missouri merchants on into the Mexican provinces of Chihuahua and Sonora. Along this trail went fur traders seeking to collect the valuable beaver pelts from the streams of the Southwest. Thus by trader and trapper was the Santa Fé Trail worn deeper and made longer until it reached south into Mexico and westward toward the Pacific. In 1828 Sylvester and James Ohio Pattie pushed on to California and the Pacific Ocean, to be followed in the next few years by other trappers and traders; and they by merchants and settlers, many of whom remained to become the founders of Anglo-American California.

Chapter II

CHAPTER II

Along the Oregon Trail

NOT LONG after the traders had found a way through the Indian Country to Santa Fé a second route to the Far West came into use. This led to the northwest instead of to the southwest, and sought the lands on the Columbia River then beginning to be known as the Oregon Country. The Oregon Trail originated in the activities of the fur traders. Following the famous expedition of Lewis and Clark to the mouth of the Columbia River in 1804-05 the American fur trade on the upper Missouri River advanced with rapid strides. In 1811 John Jacob Astor established a post on the Columbia River and planned to combine a transcontinental trade with traffic with the Orient. Although the war with Great Britain in 1812 proved disastrous to his scheme, and the British agents took over his establishment, the idea of American control was not forgotten by American adventurers.

Gradually the real possibilities of the Oregon Country became known and diplomacy tried its hand. In 1818 neither Great Britain nor the United States held the region strongly enough to establish an indisputable claim and neither was willing to recede; therefore a treaty providing for a joint occupation for a period of ten years was adopted. This was later extended for another decade.

Before the end of the second decade the tide of westward movement grew so strong as to indicate that Oregon was to become American and not British soil. By 1832 numerous independent companies of fur traders were pushing farther to the west. In 1823 William Ashley's party had discovered South Pass which provided an easy crossing over the Continental Divide and became thereafter the most popular route across the central Rockies. Through this pass Captain Bonneville with James Bridger and a company of one hundred men journeyed with wagons in 1832, and returned well paid for their efforts. That same year Nathaniel J. Wyeth led yet another expedition which attracted much attention because of the peculiarities of men and equipment. These expeditions helped to call attention to the possibilities of the Pacific Coast as a suitable place for settlement and thus hastened the time when the rising tide would sweep across the Indian frontier into the Far West.

The fur traders did their work well as explorers, but the actual acquisition of the Oregon Country was due to the agricultural settlements. This was brought about, strange as it may seem, largely through the agency of the missionaries of the Protestant churches who were first attracted to Oregon to minister to the needs of the native Indians. In 1834 Jason and Daniel Lee were sent to Oregon by the Methodist Missionary Board, followed in 1836 by Marcus Whitman of the Presbyterian Board. Work among the natives did not prosper as fully as these missionaries had anticipated and attention was turned to the needs of the ever increasing white population. In fact the American missionaries became active promoters of American immigration. Marcus Whitman, with a sense of the importance of proving the practicability of a route across the mountains to Oregon, had persisted in bringing with him his wagon, later reduced to a cart, as far as

the headwaters of the Snake River, a branch of the Columbia. Letters of the Lees and Whitman encouraged and urged American migration to Oregon. There was also Lansford W. Hastings who assisted greatly in this westward movement not only in exploration but by his unusual ability as a writer. Because of these activities, Hastings' name became identified with the West in a very definite manner. In 1846 he published his experiences and observations in the form of a guide book which was revised in 1849, for use by the increased numbers of California emigrants of that year.

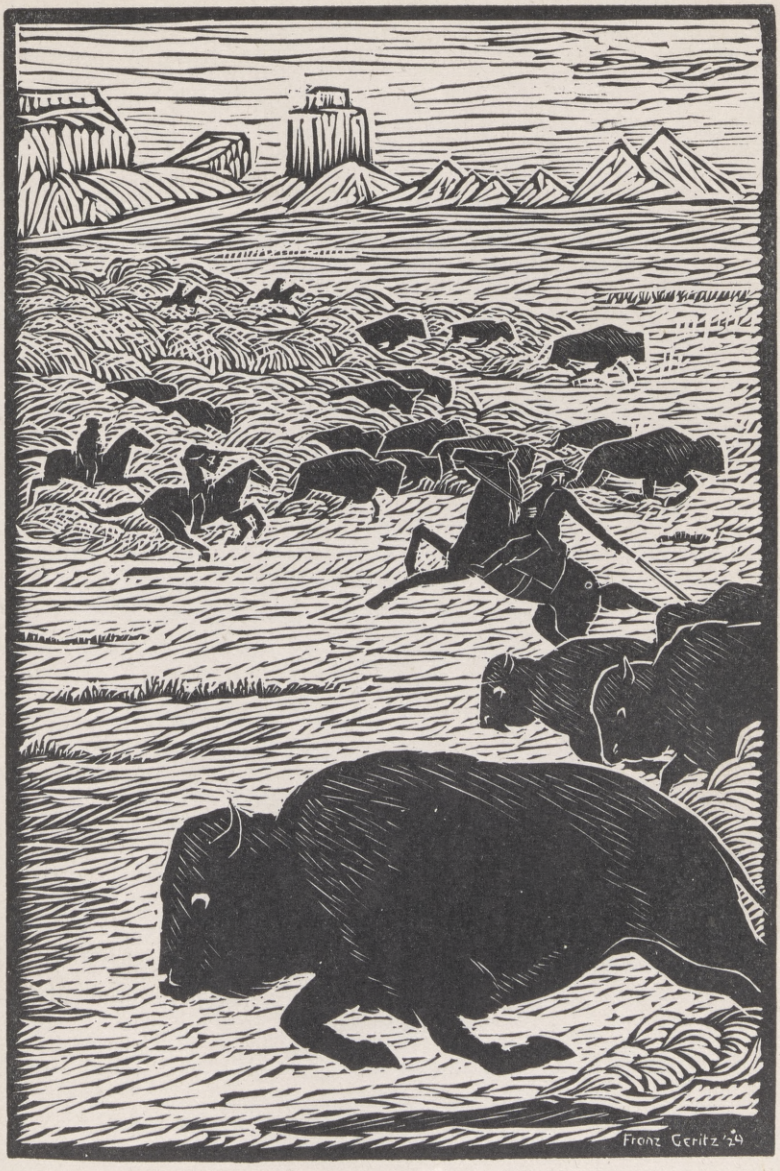
Hastings' Account

Hastings' description of his trip over the Oregon Trail in 1842 furnishes such an excellent picture of the experiences of the trail that passages from it are here given verbatim, with all his amazing array of commas:

"The author long having had an anxious desire to visit those wild regions upon the great Pacific, which had now become the topic of conversation in every circle, and in reference to which, speculations both rational and irrational were everywhere in vogue, now determined to accomplish his desired object; for which purpose he repaired to Independence, Missouri, which place was the known rendezvous of the Santa Fé traders, and the trappers of the Rocky Mountains. Having arrived at Independence, he was so fortunate as to find, not only the Santa Fé traders, and the Rocky Mountain trappers, but also a number of emigrants, consisting of families and young men, who had convened there with the view of crossing the Rocky Mountains, and were waiting very patiently until their number should be so increased as to afford protection and insure the safety of all, when they contemplated setting out together, for their favorite place of destination, Oregon territory. The number of emigrants

continued to increase with such rapidity, that on the 15th day of May, our company consisted of one hundred and sixty persons, giving us a force of eighty armed men, which was thought ample for our protection. Having organized, and having ascertained that all had provided themselves with the necessary quantum of provisions and ammunition, as well as such teams and wagons as the company had previously determined to be essential, and indispensable, and all things else being in readiness, on the 16th of May, in the year 1842, all as one man, united in interest, united in feeling, we were, *en route*, for the long desired *El Dorado* of the West.

"We passed on now very agreeably, with the exception of the occasional expression of dissatisfaction with our officers, which, however well founded, grated harshly upon the ears of the order-observing, and law-abiding portion of the company. In a very few days, we met a company of traders from Fort Larimie, on their way to the States, with their returns of furs and buffalo robes, which they had accumulated during the previous year. These furs and robes were transported in wagons, drawn by oxen. Here many of our party for the first time, saw the buffalo. The only ones, however, which they saw here, were eight or ten buffalo calves, which the traders had domesticated for the St. Louis market; and so domesticated were they, that they followed the cows, which had been taken out for that purpose, with very little trouble to the drivers. This meeting afforded a very favorable opportunity for forwarding letters to the States, of which many of the party were happy to avail themselves. We were informed, by this party, that we would find the buffalo upon the Platte, a few days travel below the confluence of its north and south branches; upon arriving at which place, we did find them in the greatest abundance imaginable. No adequate conception can be formed of


Franz Geritz '24

the immensity of the numerous herds, which here abound. The entire plains and prairies are densely covered, and completely blackened with them, as far as the most acute vision extends. Now the most feverish anxiety, and confused excitement prevails. Those who are accustomed to buffalo hunting, are almost instantly upon their fleet horses, and in chase, while those unaccustomed to such scenes, 'green horns,' as they are called, are in the greatest confusion, adjusting saddles and martingals, tightening girths and spurs, loading guns and pistols, and giving their friends, wives and children, all manner of assurances of their unparalleled success. . . .

"The experienced hunter is soon seen returning to camp, with his horse heavily laden with the choicest portions of some of the numerous buffalo which he has slain. In order that the company may now obtain a supply of the delicious fresh meat, with which the plains are strewed, it is directed to encamp, which having been done, all are soon abundantly supplied. . . ."

Rebellion on the Trail

"By this time, the party had become greatly incensed with the officers, and had determined upon holding an election, for the purpose of electing other officers. Accordingly an election was held, which resulted in the election of myself to the first, and a Mr. Lovejoy to the second office of our infant *republic*. This election gave some dissatisfaction, to a few of the party, especially the disaffected and disappointed office-holders and office-seekers, who now, together with a few others, separated themselves from the main body, and went on a few days in advance, to Fort Larimie, where they had been but a few days, when the main body arrived. Upon arriving at Forts Larimie and John, we were received in a very kind and friendly manner by the gentlemen of those forts,

who extended every attention to us, while we remained in their vicinity. While here several of our party disposed of their oxen and wagons, taking horses in exchange. This they were induced to do, under the impression that their wagons could not be taken to Oregon, of which they were assured by the gentlemen of those forts and other mountaineers. Many others of the party, disposed of their cows and other cattle, which had become tender-footed, as from this cause, it was supposed, that they would soon be unable to travel; but we found by experience, that by continued driving, their hoofs became more and more hardened, until they had entirely recovered. Before leaving these forts, the disaffected of our party, proposed to unite their destinies again with ours; but the main body being so exasperated with their former course, for some time refused their consent, yet in view of the fact, that they must either travel with us, remain at these forts, or return to the States, they were permitted to join us again, when, we were once more enabled to continue our toilsome, yet interesting journey.

"Leaving these forts, we had traveled but a few miles, when we met a company of trappers and traders, from Fort Hall, on their way to the States, among whom was a Mr. Fitspateric, who joined our party, as a guide, and traveled with us, as such, to Green river. From this gentleman's long residence in the great western prairies, and the Rocky mountains, he is eminently qualified as a guide, of which fact, we were fully convinced, from the many advantages which we derived from his valuable services. He was employed by Dr. White, who had received the appointment of Indian agent of Oregon, and who was under the impression, that our government would defray all such expenses; which impression, however, I think, was entirely unfounded. Perfect unanimity of feeling and purpose, now having been fully restored, we passed on

very agreeably, and with little or no interruption, until we arrived at Sweet-water, near Independence rock. Here we had the misfortune to lose a young man, by the name of Bailey, who was killed by the accidental discharge of a gun. . . ."

On the Sweetwater

"The company having left our unfortunate encampment, on Sweet-water, early in the morning, soon passed Independence rock, which will be described, in the description of the routes. A Mr. Lovejoy and myself stopped at this rock with a view of spending a few hours, in examining its peculiar structure, as well as to observe the various names, there to be seen, of individuals who have passed that way; and at the same time, to inscribe our own names, with the number of our company, the date of our passing; and whatever else might occur to us, as being serviceable to those who might subsequently pass that way. Having provided ourselves with materials for lettering, we tied our horses at the foot of this extraordinary rock, where we also left our guns, and commenced our toilsome assent up the rocky declivity. The company had, in the meantime, gone on, supposing that we would find no difficulty in overtaking them, whenever we had accomplished our purpose."

Hastings then relates a thrilling experience with the red men. While he and his companion were descending from the rock seven Indians appeared and disputed their advance. The white men succeeded in mounting their horses and as they were about to make a dash away from the enemy, to their astonishment the whole country seemed suddenly to be completely covered with Indians. "They seemed to have sprung up from behind every rock, to have come down from every hill, and mountain; and to have emerged from every valley and ravine."

The appearance of such a large band of Indians placed the two white men in a very perilous position, especially so in view of the red men's threatening manner. The whites were disarmed and closely guarded. Later they were given horses, other than their own, and forced to accompany the Indians in a direction away from the line of advance of the Oregon emigrants. Presently the Indians were again in confusion over an important discovery by the scouts, and were preparing to make an attack. The Indians had for the first time seen the main overland party and were determined to attack it. Hastings protested to their chief the danger of such an attack to the Indians as well as to the whites, but he was not able to stop the preparations. In the confusion the two white men made a desperate but successful attempt to escape to their friends. Fortunately bloodshed was prevented through the efforts of a Canadian member of the Oregon party who arranged a parley between the whites and the red men. They smoked the "pipe of peace," exchanged presents and parted on very friendly terms.

"A few days subsequently, a rather serious difference occurred, which arose from the refusal of one of our men, to stand his guard, in conformity to the regulations of the party. His refusal being reported to the proper officers, he was subjected to a trial, and found guilty, when the ordinary sentence was passed upon him, to which, he refused to submit. The officers, however, informed him that he would be required absolutely, to comply with the sentence, or submit to expulsion from the party; after which, he would not be permitted either to travel, or encamp with the company. As he still refused to comply with the sentence, two men were ordered to arm themselves, and remove him, and his effects, at least, one mile from the encampment. They accordingly repaired to his tent, informing him of their orders, and determination to

carry them into effect, unless he should, immediately, agree to comply with the sentence. He still remained obstinate, refusing to comply, and at the same time, appeared to be making arrangements for his defence, against any attempt to effect his forcible removal. No one, however, apprehended the least danger from any movement on his part; for we had already, witnessed several exhibitions of his *bravery*. The men designated to remove him, now informed him, notwithstanding his threats, that it became their duty to remove him from the encampment, 'dead or alive,' and that they intended to discharge that duty at all hazards. This decided course soon brought him to his senses, when he, through a friend of his, or rather, a friend of order, suggested that he be allowed a re-hearing, which was accordingly granted him, by the officers. On the following day, after arriving at the encampment, a jury was summoned to investigate and determine the matter, who, after having heard the evidence, and deliberated for a few moments, acquitted the violator of orders, upon the condition that he, thereafter, punctually discharge every duty devolving upon him, in reference to standing guard, and otherwise; which he did afterwards, with unusual punctuality. He had so profited by this lesson, that day or night, rain or shine, he was always to be found at his post; or from it, as the various orders happened to suggest."

To Fort Hall

"Nothing further, worthy of remark, occurred until we reached the Colorado of the west, or Green river, where we encamped for several days. During our stay at this place, it was suggested that we leave our wagons, in order to facilitate our progress. This proposition was made, and insisted upon, by those who had an anxiety to reach Fort Hall, at an early day, for reasons unknown to us;

and for the promotion of interests foreign from ours; yet so urgently was it insisted upon, and so cogent were many of the reasons, which were urged, that several of the party determined to leave their wagons, and to prosecute the residue of their journey on horseback; while I, together with a majority of the party, was of the opinion, that it was not necessary to leave the wagons, consequently, we determined to take them to Fort Hall, at least, that being the extent to which they had been previously taken. We accordingly, proceeded to make our arrangements to go on with our wagons, leaving those behind, who had determined to leave theirs, as they were under the necessity of converting them into packsaddles, which, by the by, was attended with much labor and inconvenience. Our guide, Mr. Fitzpateric, concurring in opinion, with those who had determined to leave their wagons, remained with them, the consequence of which was, that we were under the necessity of prosecuting the residue of our journey without a guide; unless we should accidentally fall in with one, elsewhere. Many of those who designed to leave their wagons, urged us to leave ours also, insisting that if we took them on, we would arrive at Fort Hall, so late in the season, that we would be under the necessity of remaining there during the winter; or that we would perish in our attempt to cross the Blue mountains. Others insisted that as we had no guide, it would be utterly impossible for us to find our way to Fort Hall, and that, consequently, we would inevitably, perish by the way. We, however, confident in our own ability to do what others had done; and believing that 'some things could be done as well as others,' determined to pursue our journey at all events, and at all hazards, with, or without a guide, as circumstances might determine. Seeing our determination, a Mr. Meek, who had formerly passed through that region, as far as Fort Hall, offered his services as our guide.

Believing that he might be found serviceable to us, to some extent, at least, we employed him, when we were soon in readiness for our departure. The order being given to march, our friends now crowded around us, for the purpose of taking their leave of us, and at the same time, lamenting the necessity which impelled our separation. . . .

"Leaving our obstinate friends, as we thought them, we now moved onward, while they resumed their extraordinary business of converting wagons into pack-saddles. We had passed on but a few days, when contrary to our own expectations, and contrary to all the lights of prophecy before us, we all arrived, about the same time, at Fort Hall; we with; and they without their wagons.

"Upon arriving at this fort, we were received in the kindest manner, by Mr. Grant, who was in charge; and we received every aid and attention from the gentlemen of that fort, during our stay in their vicinity. We were here informed, by Mr. Grant, and other gentlemen of the company, that it would be impossible for us to take our wagons down to the Pacific, consequently, a meeting of the party was called, for the purpose of determining whether we should take them further, or leave them at this fort, from which place it appeared, that we could take them, about half way to the Pacific, without serious interruption. Some insisted that the great convenience of having wagons with us, would amply warrant taking them as far as we could; while others thought, as we would eventually be under the necessity of leaving them, it would be preferable to leave them at the fort, especcially as there we could obtain tools, and all other means of manufacturing our packing equipage, which we could not do elsewhere. Another reason which was urged in favor of leaving them was, that we could, perhaps, sell them for something at this place, which we could do, at

no other point upon the route. The vote having been taken, it was found that a large majority was opposed to taking them any further, the consequence of which was, that there was no alternative for the minority, as our little government was purely democratic. Mr. Grant purchased a few of our wagons, for a mere trifle, which he paid in such provisions as he could dispose of, without injury to himself. He could not, of course, afford to give much for them, as he did not need them, but bought them merely as an accomodation. Those who did not sell to Mr. Grant, got nothing for theirs; but left them there, to be destroyed by the Indians, as soon as we had commenced our march. This was a serious loss, as most of the wagons and harness, were very valuable. Eight or ten days were occupied, in consummating our arrangements for the residue of our cheerless journey. In the interim, those of our company, who left us at Green river, had accomplished their preliminary arrangements, and had gone on, several days in advance. We were enabled, at this fort, to exchange our poor and way-worn horses, for those which had not been injured by use; having done which, to considerable extent; having purchased many; having procured such additional provisions as could be obtained; and having convinced ourselves that we were invincible, we, once more, resumed our dangerous journey, over the burning sands, and through the trackless deserts of Oregon."

Oregon at Last

"Upon this portion of our journey, we had anticipated many difficulties and hardships, especially, as we were entirely unacquainted with our new method of traveling, and as we were unable to procure a guide; yet, we proceeded with much less difficulty than we had anticipated. Arriving at Fort Boisia [Boise], we were very kindly re-

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ceived and entertained by the gentlemen in charge, who kindly proffered to let us have such provisions as we needed, and to render us any additional service in his power. . . . The portion of the party to which I belonged did not cross the river, but kept directly down it, upon the south side. Leaving Fort Boisia, the next place of note, at which we arrived, was a presbyterian mission, in charge of which, is a Dr. Whitman, who is a very kind and hospitable gentleman. He received us with the utmost kindness and attention, and insisted upon our remaining a few days with him, in order to obtain some relaxation of both body and mind, to which proposition, we finally acceded. Our stay with the doctor, included the Sabbath, during which day, we attended divine service, at his residence. In the forenoon, he delivered a discourse to the Indians, in their own language, to which they appeared to be very attentive, evidently comprehending the truths and doctrines inculcated. Having had a few hours intermission, we again convened, when the doctor delivered a very able discourse to our company, the other members of the mission, and his family. This scene was the more interesting to us, as we had then, for the last four months, heard nothing but the terrific howl of wild beasts of prey, and the furious midnight yell, of a hostile and barbarous foe. The doctor is not only a very kind and hospitable gentleman, but he is no doubt, a very good man, and a devoted christian. He appears to be rendering great service, in christianizing and civilizing the natives. We spent a few days at this place, during which time, we were enabled to exchange many horses with the Indians, as well as, to purchase many, and also, to obtain our additional supply of provisions, which, having been done to the extent that we desired, we again proceeded upon our dismal journey.

"The first day after leaving this mission we passed Fort

Wallawalla, at which place we stopped but a few minutes, when we passed on, and in a few days, arrived at the methodist mission at the dalles. Mr. Perkins is in charge of this mission. He bestowed every attention upon us, and rendered us every aid in his power. We, however, remained but a few days here, when we, once more, recommenced our pilgrimage; and without any thing further worthy of remark, we arrived, on the fifth day of October, in the lower settlements of Oregon."

Each year after 1842 the emigration to Oregon became larger. The hard times of the later 'thirties were now over and the people were beginning to look for greater opportunities for advancement. The exploration of Lieutenant John C. Frémont along the Platte River to South Pass in 1842, and on to Oregon in 1843, gave a great impetus to the Oregon emigration, his official reports serving as excellent guide books.

In 1843 the American population in Oregon had become so numerous that it was decided to establish a territorial government under the authority of the United States. This brought to a crisis the negotiations with Great Britain regarding the boundaries of Oregon and gave an issue which aided in the election of President Polk in 1844, on a policy favoring westward expansion.

The increased emigration owed much to the letters of the missionaries as well as to the able writings of L. W. Hastings, Hall J. Kelley, and others who felt it to be their mission to make Oregon an American commonwealth. This feeling is well illustrated in the following extract, with another grand march of commas, colons and semicolons, from the work of Hastings before quoted:

"In view of their increasing population, accumulating wealth, and growing prosperity, I can not but believe, that the time is not distant, when those wild forests, trackless plains, untrodden valleys, and the unbounded

ocean, will present one grand scene, of continuous improvements, universal enterprise, and unparalleled commerce: when those vast forests, shall have disappeared, before the hardy pioneer; those extensive plains, shall abound with innumerable herds, of domestic animals; those fertile valleys, shall groan under the immense weight of their abundant products: when those numerous rivers, shall teem with countless steamboats, steamships, ships, barques and brigs; then the entire country, will be everywhere intersected, with turnpike roads, railroads and canals; and when, all the vastly numerous, and rich resources, of that now, almost unknown region, will be fully and advantageously developed. To complete this picture, we may fancy to ourselves, a Boston, a New York, a Philadelphia and a Baltimore, growing up in a day, as it were, both in Oregon and California; crowded with a vast population, and affording all the enjoyments and luxuries, of civilized life. And to this we may add, numerous churches, magnificent edifices, spacious colleges, and stupenduous monuments and observatories, all of Grecian architecture, rearing their majestic heads, high in the aerial region, amid those towering pyramids of perpetual snow, looking down upon all the busy, bustling scenes, of tumultuous civilization amid the eternal verdure of perennial spring. And in fine, we are also led to contemplate the time, as fast approaching, when the supreme darkness of ignorance, superstition, and despotism, which now, so entirely pervade, many portions of those remote regions, will have fled forever, before the march of civilization, and the blazing light, of civil and religious liberty; when genuine *republicanism*, and unsophisticated *democracy*, shall be reared up, and tower aloft, even upon the now wild shores, of the great Pacific, where they shall forever stand forth, as enduring monuments, to the in-

creasing wisdom of *man*, and the infinite kindness and protection, of an all-wise, and over-ruling *Providence*."

In response to the writings of Hastings and others this dream of civilization advancing into the Far West was fast becoming a reality. Patriotic American frontiersmen were pushing westward to establish American control firmly, and incidentally to get for themselves the choicer farm lands. Other emigrants had been turning southward from the Oregon Trail into the Mexican province of California which offered many advantages for settlement. John Bidwell led such a party into California in 1841, followed by many others in the succeeding years. Meanwhile the emigration of the Mormon people under Brigham Young from Illinois in 1847 had also followed the Platte River, but had turned through the Wasatch Mountains and stopped on the shores of Great Salt Lake, where they had established their new Mormon colony, soon to be known as Utah.

Thus by 1848 the Platte River route had become well established. For hundreds of miles it led through the Indian Country. It was usually spoken of as the "Oregon Trail" because the greater part of the travel over it had the Columbia River country as an objective, but that portion of it which lay along the north bank of the river, because of its use by the emigrants to Salt Lake, was referred to as the "Mormon Trail." Events to be considered in later chapters brought about a subsequent change, when it became known as the "Trail of the 'Forty-niners."

Chapter III

CHAPTER III

The Gold Discovery Arouses the World

WHEN SAM BRANNAN startled San Francisco with the cry "*Gold!* GOLD! GOLD from the American River!!!"and impressed upon his fellow townsmen the importance of the discovery which had taken place within their province, he started a cry which was "heard 'round the world" just as truly as was the musket shot of the minute man of Lexington. In *Gold Days* (Coy) an account is given of the reception of the news of Marshall's discovery by the inhabitants of California in 1848. It will be the business of this chapter to consider its effect outside the limits of California and to relate how reaction to that news led to the great migration of 1849 and subsequent years.

During the summer and fall of 1848 word of Marshall's discovery drifted across the mountains and over the waves and little by little the importance of the great news became understood. Among the first people outside of California to learn of the gold discovery were the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands. During the Spanish and Mexican régime in California these islands held a position of great importance in Pacific Coast commerce, for practically all vessels visiting the ports of Oregon and California put in at Honolulu. At that port there grew up an

important colony of American and European merchants. Schools, newspapers and churches were established and there developed an economic and social life which in many ways surpassed that of the province of California. Honolulu was then a meeting place for Pacific vessels. At the time the gold excitement was at its greatest height in San Francisco, the schooner *Louise* sailed from that town and arrived at Honolulu June 17, 1848. The editor of the Honolulu *Polynesian* devoted a half column of the next issue of his paper to the gold discovery and expressed the hope that the Californians could now pay the debts due the Honolulu merchants. Not long after this announcement noticeable emigration began, and soon the islands were caught in the grip of the gold fever. On July 15 the above mentioned paper reported that one vessel had already sailed, three more were preparing to go, and that two hundred people would probably sail during the next two months if accommodations were to be had. By the end of the year practically all of the European-American colony at Honolulu had left for the mainland.

From Honolulu the news reverberated to Oregon. The Brig *Mary Dare* left the islands July 15 and reached the Columbia River ports early in August. It is said that the captain of a San Francisco vessel, although he knew of the excitement, had not divulged the secret lest it interfere with the loading of his vessel with grain and flour. The effect of the news upon Oregon was similar to that in Honolulu. The Hudson's Bay Company kept close control of its men, but the American settlers of Oregon were free to emigrate and soon the southward movement began both by land and by water. Early in September a company of one hundred fifty men having ox teams and fifty wagons, with six months' supplies, started up the Willamette Valley to cross the Siskiyou Mountains. The leader of the company was Peter H. Burnett, who, within a little over

a year, was to be elected governor of the new State of California. The company followed a route opened by Applegate in 1846, until they came to the lava plains of northeastern California, where they met the Lassen Trail on Pit River. This brought them into the Sacramento Valley at Lassen's Trading Post near the mouth of Deer Creek. Other parties followed until it was feared that Oregon would be entirely depopulated. The *Oregon Spectator* declared late in 1848 that "almost the entire male population and a part of the female population of Oregon has gone gold-digging in California." Bancroft estimates that "more than half of Oregon's strength and sinew was emptied into California."

The Latin-American countries were not slow to respond to the news of the new El Dorado. Although Mexico had been severely beaten in the recent war, her people joined enthusiastically in the rush. Colonel Cave J. Couts, on the Mexican frontier with the Boundary Commission, and thus in a position to view the effects upon our southern neighbor, says of the gold fever: "The mania that pervades the whole country, our camp included, is beyond all description or credulity. The whole state of Sonora is on the move, large parties are passing us in gangs daily, and say they are not yet started." The Mexican officials tried in vain to stem the tide by telling of mistreatment of Mexicans in the mines. The estimates of the number who emigrated from Mexico during 1848 and 1849 run from four to six thousand.

Rumors of California Gold

The news soon found its way eastward. Among those working at Sutter's Mill at the time of the discovery were a half dozen young men, former members of the Mormon Battalion. They were already on their way to the Salt Lake region at the call of their leader, Brigham

Young, but had stopped temporarily to find employment with Sutter to add to their financial resources and had become witnesses of Marshall's discovery. When they left California they carried tidings of the discovery to their brethren across the Sierra. From Salt Lake it was soon relayed eastward across the Missouri frontier.

The *California Star*, one of San Francisco's two newspapers, had prepared a "special edition" for April 1, 1848, and sent it east by special express. In this paper was a six-column article by Dr. V. J. Fourgeaud on the "Prospects of California," having as its purpose the encouragement of immigration. Strange to say, the importance of the gold discovery was as yet so little appreciated in San Francisco that the paper contained only an incidental reference to that event. This small mention, however, helped to create an interest which grew as the tales of the discovery became more numerous.

About the middle of September there were received in Washington, D. C., official dispatches from Thomas O. Larkin, U. S. Consul at Monterey, announcing the discovery of gold. One had been sent on June 1, followed by another June 28, which was delivered by Lieutenant Edward F. Beale by way of Mexico. Both reached Washington about September 15.

The *New York Herald* and other papers gave publicity to these letters of Larkin's, but an article which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* September 20 called attention to the discovery in a more striking manner. From that time on it became the popular editorial practice to give space to fanciful stories containing exaggerated accounts of the Land of Gold. As an example of this type of newspaper enterprise, Bancroft quotes the *New York Journal of Commerce* which published the following purported dispatch dated at Monterey, August 29, 1848:

"At present the people are running over the country

and picking it out of the earth here and there, just as 1,000 hogs, let loose in a forest, would root up groundnuts. Some get eight or ten ounces a day, and the least active one or two. They make the most who employ the wild Indians to hunt it for them. There is one man who has sixty Indians in his employ; his profits are a dollar a minute. The wild Indians know nothing of its value, and wonder what the pale-faces want to do with it; they give an ounce of it for the same weight of coined silver, or a thimbleful of glass beads, or a glass of grog. And white men themselves often give an ounce of it, which is worth at our mint $18 or more, for a bottle of brandy, a bottle of soda powders, or a plug of tobacco. As to the quantity which the diggers get, take a few facts as evidence. I know seven men who worked seven weeks and two days, Sundays excepted, on Feather River; they employed on an average fifty Indians, and got out in these seven weeks and two days 275 pounds of pure gold. I know the men, and have seen the gold; so stick a pin there. I know ten other men who worked ten days in company, employed no Indians, and averaged in these ten days $1,500 each; so stick another pin there. I know another man who got out of a basin in a rock, not larger than a washbowl, two and one-half pounds of gold in fifteen minutes; so stick another pin there! No one of these statements would I believe, did I not know the men personally, and know them to be plain, matter-fact men—men who open a vein of gold just as cooly as you would a potato-hill."

Even though it was apparent that many of these newspaper accounts were greatly exaggerated, the effect of the reiteration of these marvelous stories of the new El Dorado could not but awaken an intense feeling of excitement among those who heard and read these tales. If they were true only in part, there must be wealth in California to a degree before unknown.

Governor Mason Confirms the Report

This was the state of mind of the country when Lieutenant L. Loeser reached Washington the first week in December with dispatches from Colonel R. B. Mason, the acting governor of California. In July, 1848, Mason had made a tour of the gold fields and under date of August 17 made a full report to his superior officer. This, together with samples of native California gold, was entrusted to Lieutenant Loeser, who then hastened east by way of Panama. Mason's report reached Washington just in time to be incorporated in the annual message of President Polk on December 5. In referring to the gold discovery, the message said: "It was known that mines of the precious metals existed to a considerable extent in California at the time of its acquisition. Recent discoveries render it probable that these mines are more extensive and valuable than was anticipated. The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service, who have visited the mineral district, and derived the facts which they detail from personal observation."

Mason's report contained a full account of his experiences in the mines during July, 1848. He related that on the way to the mines he found that "mills were lying idle, fields of wheat were open to cattle and horses, houses vacant and farms going to waste" but that in the gold mines only a "little more than three months after its first discovery, it was estimated that upwards of four thousand people were employed."

As Mason's report continued with a definite and glowing account of profits in the mines it aroused the imagination of even the most passive reader. On Weber Creek

Mason found rich diggings at what was soon to be known as Hangtown, and later as Placerville, where the deposits were "exceedingly rich, and two ounces were considered an ordinary yield for a day's work." He says: "A small gutter, not more than 100 yards long but four feet wide and two or three feet deep, was pointed out to me as the one where two men, William Daly [Daylor], and Perry McCoon, had, a short time before, obtained in seven days $17,000 worth of gold. Captain Weber informed me that he knew that these two men had employed four white men and about a hundred Indians, and that, at the end of one week's work, they paid off their party and left with $10,000 worth of this gold. Another small ravine was shown me from which had been taken $12,000 worth of gold. Hundreds of similar ravines, to all appearances, are as yet untouched."

Whatever doubt may have lingered in men's minds was dispelled by this report of Mason which was reinforced by the visual evidence of gold brought by Lieutenant Loeser in a "tea caddy" and placed on exhibit in the office of the Department of War. This contained more than 230 ounces or over $3,500 worth of real shining California gold in small pieces and nuggets.

The *Washington Union*, on the day after Loeser's arrival, announced: "We readily admit that the account so nearly approached the miraculous that we were relieved by the evidence of our own senses on the subject. The specimens have all the appearance of the native gold we had seen from the mines of North Carolina and Virginia; and we are informed that the secretary will send the small chest of gold to the mint, to be melted into coin and bars, and most of it to be subsequently fashioned into medals commemorative of the heroism and valor of our officers. Several of the other specimens he will retain for the present in the war office as found in California, in the form of

lumps, scales, and sand; the last named being of different hues, from bright yellow to black, without much appearance of gold. However sceptical any man may have been, we defy him to doubt that if the quantity of such specimens as these be as great as has been represented, the value of the gold in California must be greater than has been hitherto discovered in the old or new continent; and great as may be the emigration to this new El Dorado, the frugal and industrious will be amply repaid for their enterprise and toil."

Spread of the Gold Fever

From then on the gold fever spread rapidly. Not only did the newspapers of the United States give space to the wonderful news but they added to the excitement by interjecting the editors' personal opinions. There were many who, like Horace Greeley of the New York *Tribune*, predicted unprecedented wealth. "It is coming—nay at hand, there is no doubt of it. We are on the very brink of the Age of Gold!" he is quoted as saying. "We look for an addition, within the next four years, equal to at least one thousand millions of dollars to the general aggregate of gold in circulation and use throughout the world. This is almost inevitable."

The announcement of the gold discovery found the whole world in a very receptive mood. The United States itself was in a prosperous condition and was attracting a large European immigration. Marshall's discovery, coming as it did at almost the exact time of the close of the war with Mexico, found a large number of ex-soldiers temporarily out of employment. These welcomed the news from California as a kind dispensation of Providence and prepared to take due advantage.

Conditions outside the United States were likewise favorable for a great popular migration. The year of

Marshall's discovery, 1848, is known to students of history as a year of revolutions in Europe. Under these disturbed conditions Europe was susceptible to the gold fever. It will be remembered that after the period of Napoleonic Wars the nations of Europe had been held down to reasonable quiet under the restraining policy of the great Austrian leader, Prince Metternich. But this policy could not long continue. During the very month that Marshall discovered his first flake of gold in California, Metternich, observing the political conditions in Europe, wrote to a friend: "The world is very sick, the one thing certain is there will be tremendous changes."

Metternich's observations were correct. A popular uprising in Paris on February 22, 1848, led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Second Republic. The revolutionary movement then spread to other states and soon Prince Metternich was himself a fugitive. The downfall of the Austrian Empire seemed imminent, for Bohemia, Hungary and the Italian states were all scenes of revolt against the tyranny of Austria. North Europe also felt the influence and Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Holland and the British Isles were affected by political disturbances. From the standpoint of those seeking reform, the net result of all these revolutions was practically nil, for the forces of reaction were soon again in control.

Europe had sought to achieve reform, to liberate men from political and economic oppression, the movement had been spontaneous and general, but everywhere the result had been the same—reaction and failure. It was to this Europe that the leading papers in December, 1848, and January, 1849, brought the news of the discovery of gold in California.

As may be surmised, the effect upon the continent was to arouse an excitement second only to that caused by the

revolutions themselves. The discontented looked to the New World with hope, and those whose financial resources made it at all possible began to plan for immediate emigration with the Land of Gold as their destination.

In London no less than five companies with capital of some $6,375,000 were organized before the middle of January, 1849. A contemporary issue of the *London Times*, as quoted by Bancroft, said: "There are at this moment two great waves of population following toward the setting sun over this globe. The one is that mighty tide of human beings, which, this year, beyond all former parallel, is flowing from Ireland, Great Britain, Germany and some other parts of Europe in one compact and unbroken stream, to the United States. The other, which may almost be described as urged on by the former, is that which that furious impulse *auri sacra fames* is attracting from comfortable homes to an almost desert shore." In similar vein the Paris *Revue des Deux Mondes* of February 1, 1849, mentions that departures for San Francisco were announced from Havre, Bordeaux, and all the principal ports of Great Britain as well as many Spanish, Dutch and German ports. The governments of Europe looked on with alarm as the increased emigration decreased their population, fearing also that added gold might give the new American Republic undue power and possibly throw the financial system of the world into chaos by the depreciation of gold values.

The news reached the Far East and aroused it from its slumbers. The Chinese were especially excited over the reports and were ready to avail themselves of opportunities to reach the Land of Gold. The "celestials" were not without ambitions and the gambling instinct was strong in them. Here was a chance to give that passion full play. Urged on by the ocean transportation companies, the Chinese came to California in increasing numbers until

checked by American law. From three score Chinese in California at the beginning of 1849, the number increased to 791 by the end of the year and passed four thousand by the end of the second year.

In the Philippines the city of Manila was stirred as never before. Gambling there flourished as nowhere else, but with the reports from California even the government lottery was for a time neglected and the inhabitants were aroused "with the same desire that had influenced the Spaniards of the sixteenth century." The French Marquesas Islands heard the news and soon their population likewise was stricken by the gold fever. Those without ties hastened across the Pacific to be followed soon by the soldiery, leaving the governor of the islands alone to represent the government.

In Australia the news was broadcast with choice additions by the shipmasters who sought thereby to increase their profits. The streets of Sidney and other chief cities were placarded with posters announcing "Gold! Gold! in California!" In spite of the fact that the local journals endeavored to prevent too great emigration, there resulted an immediate rush for the gold fields. Passage on vessels was at a premium, and fortunate were those who were able to secure accommodations. California was later to know more of the "Sidney Coves" whose careers as criminals had been responsible for their enforced emigration from the British Isles. The *Placer Times* of June 2, 1849, records that up to that time "eight vessels have left that hot bed of roguery in Sidney."

South American countries soon heard the news of the discovery of gold. Lieutenant Loeser, bearing Mason's report, touched at Payta in September, 1848, and gave the first report in that region. Soon afterward vessels sent south from California to buy grain and flour paid for their purchases in gold dust, thus helping to spread the fever.

A correspondent writing to Thomas O. Larkin from Valparaiso adds, "It is reported here that California is all gold. Probably a little glitter has blinded them." Meanwhile Chileans, Peruvians and others started up the coast on the quest of El Dorado.

At the same time the gold fever was spreading throughout the United States. "And so from Maine to Texas," says Bancroft, "the preparation for travel was heard in every town. The name of California was in every mouth; it was the current theme for conversation and song, for plays and sermons. Every scrap of information concerning the country was eagerly devoured. Old works that touched upon it, or even upon the regions adjoining, were dragged from dusty hiding-places, and eager purchase made of guide-books from the busy pen of cabinet travellers. Old, staid, conservative men and women caught the infection despite press and pulpit warnings. After a parting knell of exhortation for calm and contentment, even ministers and editors shelved their books and papers to join foremost in the throng. Hitherto small though sure profits dwindled into insignificance under the new aspect, and the trader closed his ledger to depart; and so the toiling farmer, whose mortgage loomed above the growing family, the briefless lawyer, the starving student, the quack, the idler, the harlot, the gambler, the henpecked husband, the disgraced; with many earnest, enterprising, honest men and devoted women. These and others turned their faces westward, resolved to stake their all upon a cast; their swift thoughts, like the arrow of Acestes, taking fire as they flew."

Even the popular songs of the day tended to add to the enthusiasm regarding California. Jonathan Nichols, one of the Argonauts from Massachusetts, composed a song entitled "The California Emigrant" which soon swept the country. Whenever it was sung, even by those in-

capable of artistic rendition, it was received with great applause and probably spread the contagion of the gold fever as much as any other one thing. It was sung to the tune "Susannah" and ran as follows:

"Like Argos of the ancient times,
I'll leave this modern Greece;
I'm bound to California mines,
To find the golden fleece.
For who would work from morn to night
And live on hog and corn,
When one can pick up there at sight
Enough to buy a farm.

CHORUS.

"O California! that's the land for me,
I'm going to California the gold dust for to see.

"There from the snowy mountain side,
Comes down the golden sand,
And spreads a carpet far and wide
O'er all the shining land;
The rivers run on golden beds,
O'er rocks of golden ore,
The valleys six feet deep are said
To hold a plenty more.

"O California, etc.

"I'll take my wash bowl in my hand,
And thither wind my way,
To wash the gold from out the sand,
In California.
And when I get my pocket full,
In that bright land of gold
I'll have a rich and happy time;
Live merry till I'm old.

"O California, etc."

This song was but one of many produced as a result of the gold fever. The epidemic had its effect upon composers as well as those without musical talents. One

paper in February, 1849, notes this effect as seen in the new musical selections entitled, "The Gold Digger's Waltz," "The Golden Drag Waltz," "The San Francisco Waltz," and "The Sacramento Gallop." Judging from these titles we may infer that compositions of popular music in 1849 were not very widely different from those of today.

More Tales of Gold

The gold fever swept the country so generally that speakers and editors here and there felt it their duty to attempt to quiet the enthusiasm. Place was given to discouraging reports such as appeared in the editorial column of the *Cincinnati Atlas* on January 11, 1849. It reads:

"A company of gold diggers has been formed in this part of the county. This gold fever is destined before twelve months are past, to relapse into a chill. Multitudes of people will be sent to the mines from the neighboring countries of South America and Mexico before our people can arrive. The result will be the cream of the gold pickings will be skimmed off, while with no agriculture and exorbitant prices, numbers of these adventurers will in the end suffer disappointment and want."

Such words of caution could have little effect when during the next few weeks readers of the same paper were furnished news reports which set forth as fact that "hundreds of vessels and tens of thousands of persons" were on their way, or about to start; that gold dust sold in California for six dollars per ounce; that Captain Marcy, son of the Secretary of War, was said to have collected fifteen barrels of gold dust in California and had been required to bury it because he had no way to protect it until a vessel of war should come. These reports were followed by others equally startling. One poor mother, who had been getting help from her neighbors, received a draft for

two thousand dollars from her son in California, who wrote her not to be sparing as he had plenty of money. Another tale was related of a company of men in the diggings who saw gold on the surface of the ground. They promptly dropped down and spread out their arms and legs, claiming preëmption to all the surface they could cover. Their title was held to be good and each member of the party got about three hundred dollars in gold dust. Then came the tale of a runaway soldier who discovered a rock of gold that weighed 839 pounds and 11¼ ounces. Fearing to leave it, he sat upon it for sixty-seven days. When he offered two thousand seven hundred dollars for a plate of pork and beans he was refused because he was so niggardly!

These stories bear such evident marks of exaggeration that one wonders if they contributed much to encourage the epidemic. Soon there appeared more convincing news: Men had arrived in the states bringing with them real California gold! Early in January of 1849 one man was reported to have returned to New York with $50,000 in gold dust. In March the ship *Czar* arrived in New York with $70,000 in California gold. In April, Edward A. Sauerkrop, former Danish Consul at the Sandwich Islands, arrived in New York bringing one thousand ounces of gold. Soon afterward came the ship *Mount Wolaston* with $20,000 which one of the passengers had gathered the previous season. On June 1, 1849, the papers carried the following news item:

"Mr. Parrot, United States Consul, left Mazatlan April 10, and arrived in New York last evening. He has $40,000 worth of gold dust. It is estimated that the amount of gold found and to be obtained from placers during the present year will amount to thirty million dollars. Three or four new quicksilver mines have been

discovered and platinum is known to exist in considerable quantities."

It soon became evident that there would be an unprecedented rush to the newly discovered gold region. Vessels of all kinds were made ready for the long voyage. Shipbread and foods of such kinds as could be carried on the journey became scarce because of the great demand. The factories making firearms of all sorts, blankets, rubber goods and clothing suitable for the miner were worked to their utmost capacity to meet the demands.

The Argonauts of '49

Along with the problem of securing the necessary supplies went also that of choosing the best and quickest route to El Dorado. The attention of the man along the Atlantic Coast was turned toward the sea. The snows of a northern winter would have no effect upon a cruise around the southern continent. There were short cuts across Panama, Nicaragua and Mexico. "In November, 1848," says Bancroft, "the movement began with the departure of several vessels. In December it had attained the dimensions of a rush. From New York, Boston, Salem, Norfolk, Philadelphia and Baltimore, between the 14th of December, 1848, and the 18th of January, 1849, there departed sixty-one sailing vessels, averaging fifty passengers each, to say nothing of those sent from Charleston, New Orleans and other ports. Sixty ships were announced to sail from New York in the month of February, 1849, seventy from Philadelphia and Boston, and eleven from New Bedford. The hegira continued throughout the year, and during the winter of 1849 and the spring of 1850, two hundred fifty vessels sailed for California from the eastern ports of the United States alone, forty-five of which arrived at San Francisco in one day." The story

of the Argonauts is well told in "By Sea to California" (Ament), Part II of *Oxcart to Airplane*.

"In June," says Theodore H. Hittell, "the emigrant ships from the Atlantic seaboard—that long line of argonauts which dotted the route down one side of the two continents and up the other—began reaching the Golden Gate and pouring their multitudes into the population of the golden land. In June eleven of them arrived; in July forty; in August forty-three; in September sixty-six; in October twenty-eight; in November twenty-three, and in December nineteen; or altogether counting two vessels that arrived in April and one in May, a total of two hundred and thirty-three in nine months. Besides these vessels from United States ports, there arrived during the same nine months from other ports three hundred and sixteen, making a grand total of five hundred and forty-nine vessels or an average of two a day. A great number of them were unseaworthy; and when they reached the bay of San Francisco, they remained there. Some were purposely abandoned as unfit for further service; others on account of being deserted by their crews, were carelessly left to become worm-eaten and useless; and others, by managing to get hands enough to work them at enormous wages, were used as coasters. Some were run on the mud flats in front of the town and converted into storehouses. But the most of them were left to tug at their anchors, out of the way of travel—respectable but neglected members of the large fleet of old hulks, that for many years afterwards added a picturesque grace to the appearance of the water front."

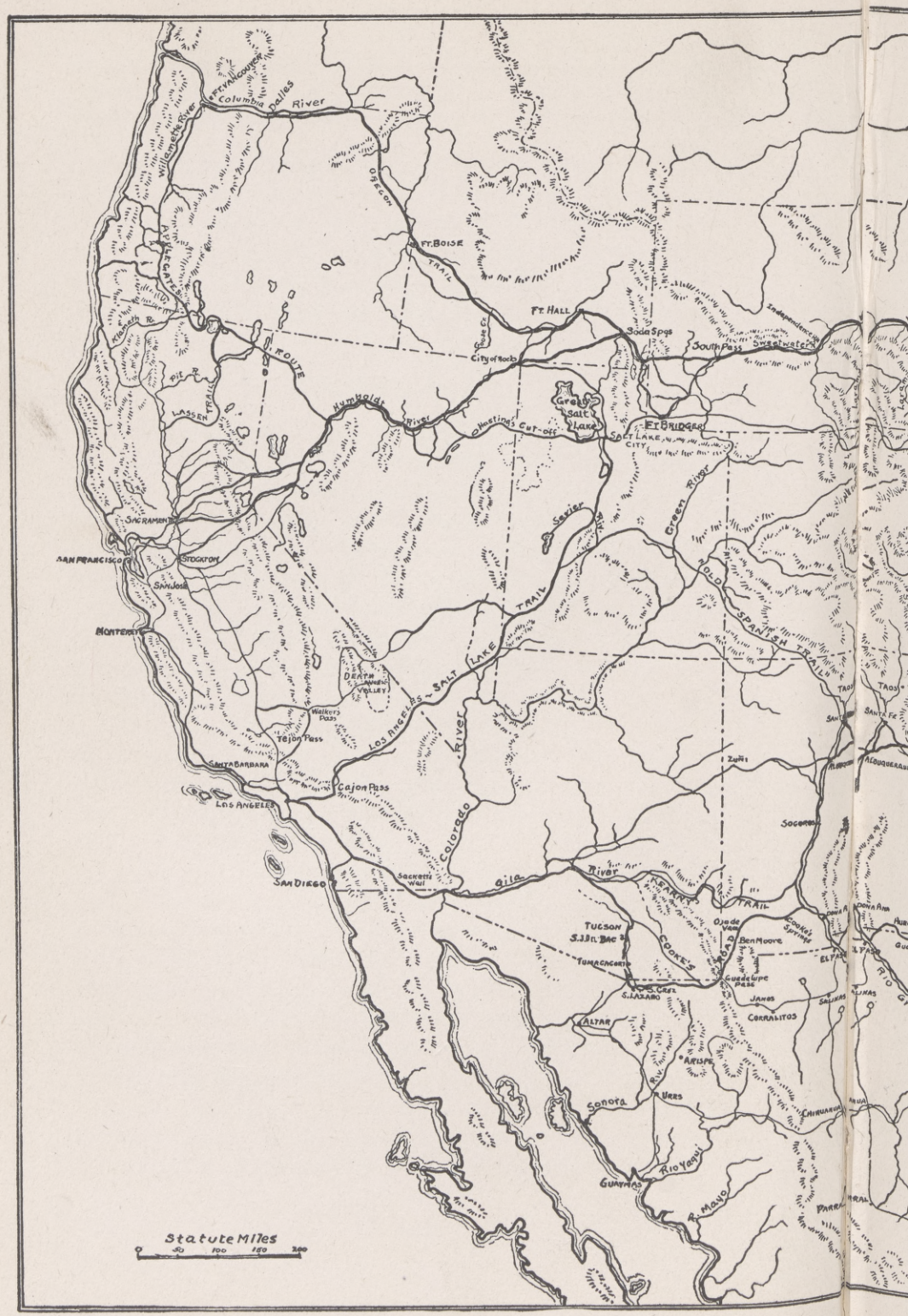
The water routes were open at all times of the year and during the winter of 1848-49 were sought by those near the ocean ports. Notwithstanding the great emigration to California by way of the ocean, this movement included only a part of those who turned their faces

toward the new El Dorado. The overland routes naturally suggested themselves to the middle westerner. He already knew something of the westward leading trails and was much more familiar with the use of an ox or mule team than with sailboat or steamship. He therefore sought the gold fields by turning toward the western frontier.

Selection of Routes

To the overland emigrant in 1849, there was a choice of many routes. Each of these soon had its advocates hoping to gain advantage to themselves or their city by directing or diverting traffic along their favorite route. L. W. Hastings, in his *New History of Oregon and California*, gives a full description of the various feasible routes. Inasmuch as this was published in Cincinnati in 1849, and served as an emigrant guide book, it is of interest to note his discussion of the trails. His commas have again been carefully preserved.

"In all," he writes, "there are eight distinct routes to those countries, six of these lie through the different passes mentioned upon a former page; one of the remaining two is that by the way of New Orleans, Vera Cruz, the city of Mexico, and Mazatlan; and the other is the route by sea, by the way of Cape Horn. There are but five of the above routes, which are worthy of a particular notice; all of which, I will now proceed briefly, to describe. The most northern of them is that lying through the great gap, between Brown's and Hooker's peakes, through which the Canadian emigrants, and the fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, annually pass, in their journeying from Canada, to the lower settlements in Oregon. As this route is very seldom, if ever, traveled by citizens of the United States, it is not deemed important, to enlarge in its description. I shall therefore, proceed to



Ft. Vancouver
Columbia River
Dalles
Willamette River
Oregon Trail
Ft. Boise
Applegate
Klameth R.
Route
Pit R.
Lassen Trail
Ft. Hall
Soda Spgs
South Pass
Sweetwater
Independence
City of Rocks
Humboldt River
Hastings Cut-off
Great Salt Lake
Ft. Bridger
Salt Lake City
Sevier
Green River
Sacramento
San Francisco
Stockton
San Jose
Monterey
Salt Lake Trail
Old Spanish Trail
Death Valley
Walker's Pass
Tejon Pass
Los Angeles
Santa Barbara
Cajon Pass
Los Angeles
Colorado River
Zuñi
Taos
Santa Fe
Albuquerque
Socorro
San Diego
Sackett's Well
Gila River
Kearny Trail
Tucson
S.J. Bac
Tumacacori
Cooke's Road
Ojo de Vera
Ben Moore
Cooke's Springs
El Paso
Guadalupe Pass
S. Cruz
S. Lazaro
Janos
Corralitos
Salinas
Altar
Arispe
Sonora
Ures
Chihuahua
Guaymas
Rio Yaqui
R. Mayo
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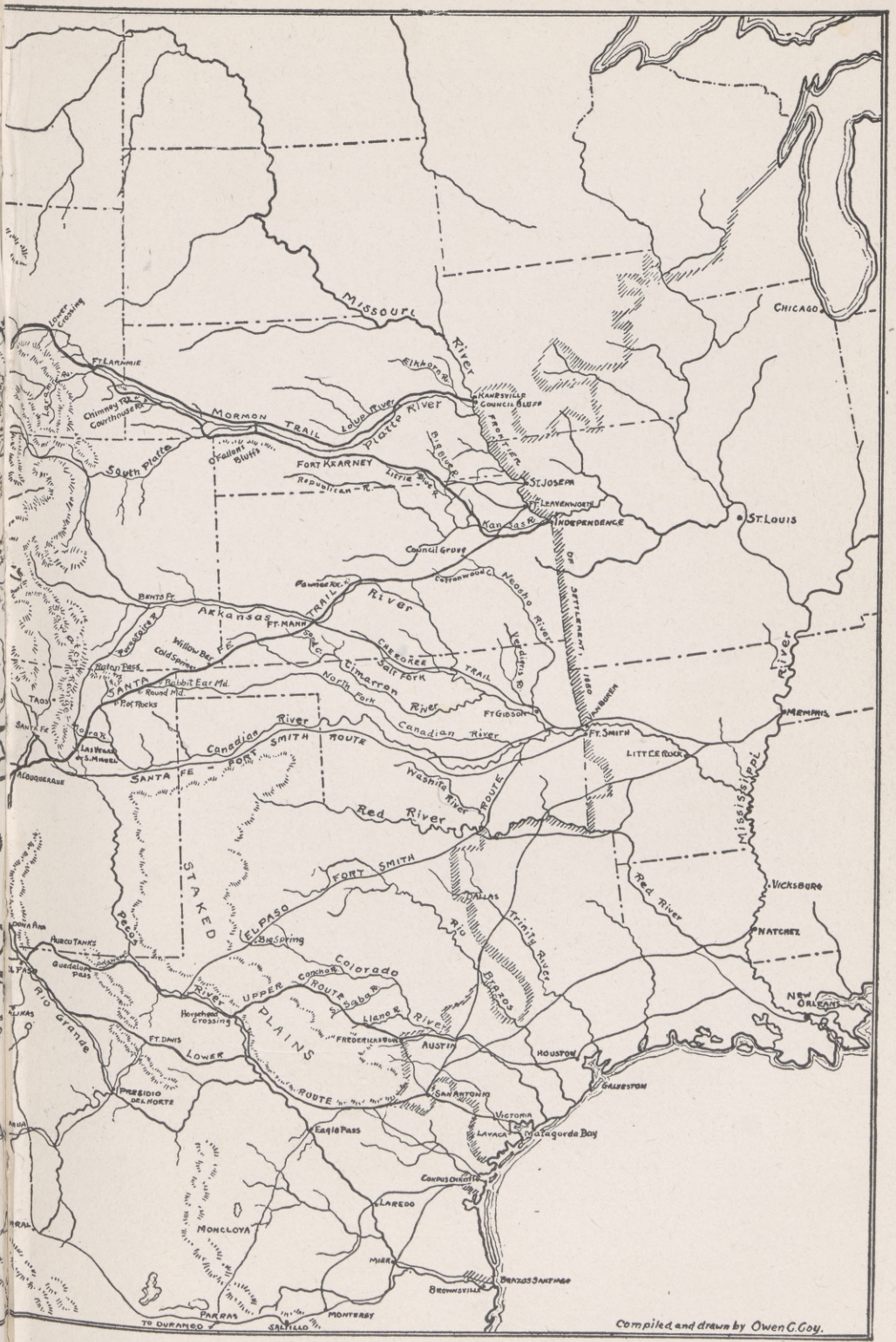

Compiled and drawn by Owen C. Coy.

the description of that lying through the great southern pass [South Pass], near latitude 42 degrees north."

The writer then proceeds to describe the Platte Trail from Independence to South Pass and on via Fort Hall, which was the common route for emigrants both to Oregon and California. He, however, recommends that the California emigrants would find a more direct route should they turn off the Oregon road about two hundred miles east of Fort Hall, taking a route south of Great Salt Lake. This was the "Hastings Cut-off" which was used with varying success by many travelers.

"The emigrants, up to this time, however," Hastings continues, "have traveled together, as far as Fort Hall, because of this being the only settlement, in that vicinity, at which they are enabled to procure horses, and provisions. The soda springs, however, will undoubtedly, be found to be the point, at which the routes will most advantageously diverge, both in reference to directness, and to the obtaining of supplies; for there is no doubt, but that a town, of very considerable importance, will spring up, at that point, in a very few years. The entire distance by this route, from Independence, either to Oregon or California, is about twenty-one hundred miles; and the usual time required in performing the journey, to either of those countries, will be found to be about one hundred and twenty days, exclusive of delays; yet the great disadvantages, under which parties have, heretofore, labored, have caused them to occupy much more time, than that above stated, in performing the journey. It is a surprising fact, that upon this entire route, from the States, either to Oregon or California, there is not a stream that emigrants cross, but that is fordable, at the season of the year, at which they pass through those regions."

Hastings then gives attention to the route by way of Santa Fé, "that usually traveled, by the Santa Fé traders

and Mexican emigrants, as well as emigrants from our southern States. Because of the very little importance of this route to our people, *at present*, it is not deemed proper to detain the reader, with a detailed description. Although this route is now deemed, rather unimportant to citizens of the United States, yet, if the time ever comes, when the intermediate country, shall belong to a civilized people, this route will become of the greatest importance, especially to the southern emigrants and travelers, who, traveling almost directly west, would save all the distance to Independence, the present place of rendezvous. . . .

"The route, by Vera Cruz, is among the most important routes to those countries, and hence, will require a more particular notice. The emigrant, who travels by this route, ships, at New Orleans, for Vera Cruz, where, if he sails from New Orleans, he arrives in seven or eight days; thence by stage, three days, to the city of Mexico; thence by stage, six days, to Guadalaxara; thence on horseback, two days, to St. Blas; thence by water, twelve days, to California, or twenty days to Oregon. By adding about the same time, as that above stated, for delays, we will have, very nearly, the time required, in performing the journey to Oregon or California, by this route, which will be found to be, about one month and a half, to the former place, and about one month and six days, to the latter place. This is the route, by which I returned to the United States; but I was more than three months, in reaching the States, even from California; yet many of the usual delays, may be avoided. It is very expensive traveling by this route, the entire expense being about five hundred dollars. . . . The principal dangers, to which travelers are exposed, in passing through that country, are those of being robbed, and insulted or murdered, because of their non-conformity to the prevailing religious ceremonies, in which, all things else, appear to be wholly absorbed.

"The route by sea, is the well known route around cape Horn, by which there is, latterly, very extensive travel to those countries, bordering upon the Pacific Ocean. . . . The usual time required, by this route, is about one hundred and twenty days; and the expense is about three hundred dollars, exclusive of all expenses, previous to departure. The doubling of cape Horn, was, formerly considered a very hazardous undertaking; latterly, however, it is not so considered, by experienced navigators. The greatest objections, which can be urged against traveling by this route, are the unpleasant, cheerless monotony, and the irksome confinement, incident to this method of traveling.

"Now, having taken this cursory view of the different routes, perhaps it would not be uninteresting to the reader, to briefly examine, the comparative advantages, and disadvantages, of each, in reference to safety, time and expense. Upon a full review of this subject, we shall find that the route, lying through the southern pass, near latitude 42 degrees north, has a decided preference, in all the above particulars. It will be observed, that traveling by this route, is much less hazardous, that but about the same time is required as in traveling by the route by sea, and very little more than is required, in traveling by the route, by the way of Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico; and that the expense is much less, by this route, than by either of the others, must be very evident. As nothing is required upon this route, but such teams and provisions, as the farmer must necessarily have at home, it may be truly said, that it costs him nothing but his time; for he can expend no money, as he travels entirely among tribes of barbarous Indians, who know nothing of money or its value."

While Hastings was giving all the encouragement possible to the Platte route, others, especially the papers of

Texas and Gulf towns, were urging the advantages of trails farther south. This movement was distinctly aided by the timely publication of Kearny's report of his expedition to California in 1846. If there were a passable route westward from Texas, the journals of that district felt especially commissioned to see that the gold seekers should be informed of the fact, for incidentally a large emigration of gold seekers would help very much to build up the gulf ports.

The gold fever, assisted by those enthusiastic promoters who proclaimed loudly the advantages of particular trails, brought to the edge of the Indian Country, in 1849, many thousands of people eager to make their way by the quickest possible route to the newly discovered El Dorado.

"The gathering," says historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, "began early in April, and by the end of the month some 20,000 representing every town and village in the States, were encamped on the frontier, making their final preparations, and waiting until the grass on the plains should be high enough to feed the animals. At the opening of May the grand procession started, and from then till the beginning of June, company after company left the frontier, till the trail from the starting-point to Fort Laramie presented one long line of pack trains and wagons. Along some sections of the road the stream was unbroken for miles, and at night, far as the eye could reach, camp-fires gleamed like the lights of a distant city."

It is this overland emigration, even greater in volume than the invasion of California by sea, to which the term "Great Trek" has been not inappropriately applied.

Chapter IV

CHAPTER IV

Democracy on the March

"A court of inquiry was organized. . . . A jury was empanneled, and court opened under a fine clump of willows. There in that primitive courthouse, on the bank of Green River, the first court was held in this God-forsaken land, for the trial of a man accused of the highest crime. At the commencement, as much order reigned as in any lawful tribunal of the States."

—Delano.

WITH GREAT masses of people gathered at various points along the frontier of the Indian Country, preparing to move to California as soon as the season would permit, intent on crossing a vast territory as yet uninhabited by civilized man, where the laws of the several states did not apply and those of the United States could scarcely be enforced, certainly the stage was set for confusion, disaster, and lawlessness to take leading rôles. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the manner in which the emigrants, of their own accord, adopted measures to meet emergencies and make it possible for them to move along the trails in an orderly and business-like manner.

"Emigrants should," reads one of the many guide books of 1849, "invariably, arrive at Independence, Missouri, on, or before, the fifteenth day of April, so as to be in readiness, to enter upon their journey, on or before the

first day of May; after which time, they should never start, if it can, possibly, be avoided. The advantages to be derived, from setting out, at as early a day as that suggested, are those of having an abundance of good pasturage, in passing over those desolate and thirsty plains; and being enabled to cross the mountains, before the falling of mountains of snow, or floods of rain, which usually occurs, in that region, early in October. Before leaving the rendezvous, emigrants should, always, organize, by dividing into such companies, and electing such officers, as shall be deemed necessary."

This advice regarding organization into companies is also given by others who undertook to give instructions to emigrants. Probably one of the most thorough of the guide books was that published by Lieutenant R. B. Marcy, under the title of *The Prairie Traveler*. He says:

"After a particular route has been selected to make the journey across the plains, and the requisite number have arrived at the eastern terminus, their first business should be to organize themselves into a company and elect a commander. The company should be of sufficient magnitude to herd and guard animals, and for protection against Indians.

"From fifty to seventy men, properly armed and equipped, will be enough for these purposes, and any greater number only makes the movements of the party more cumbersome and tardy.

"In the selection of a captain, good judgment, integrity of purpose, and practical experience are the essential requisites, and these are indispensable to the harmony and consolidation of the association. His duty should be to direct the order of march, the time of starting and halting, to select the camps, detail and give orders to guards, and, indeed, to control and superintend all the movements of the company.

"An obligation should then be drawn up and signed by all the members of the association, wherein each one should bind himself to abide in all cases by the orders and decisions of the captain, and to aid him by every means in his power in the execution of his duties; and they should also obligate themselves to aid each other, so as to make the individual interest of each member the common concern of the whole company. To ensure this, a fund should be raised for the purchase of extra animals to supply the place of those which may give out or die on the road; and if the wagon or team of a particular member should fail and have to be abandoned, the company should obligate themselves to transport his luggage, and the captain should see that he has his share of transportation equal with any other member. Thus it will be made the interest of every member of the company to watch over and protect the property of others as well as his own.

"In case of failure on the part of any one to comply with the obligations imposed by the articles of agreement after they have been duly executed, the company should, of course, have the power to punish the delinquent member, and, if necessary, exclude him from all the benefits of the association. . . .

"The advantages of an association such as I have mentioned are manifestly numerous. The animals can be herded together and guarded by the different members of the company in rotation, thereby securing to all the opportunities of sleep and rest. Besides, this is the only way to resist depredations of the Indians, and to prevent their stampeding and driving off animals; and much more efficiency is secured in every respect, especially in crossing streams, repairing roads, etc.

"Unless a systematic organization be adopted, it is impossible for a party of any magnitude to travel in company for any great length of time, and for all the members

to agree upon the same arrangements in marching, camping, etc. I have several times observed, where this has been attempted, that discords and dissensions, sooner or later arose, which invariably resulted in breaking up and separating the company.

"When a captain has once been chosen, he should be sustained in all his decisions, unless he commit some manifest outrage, when a majority of the company can always remove him, and put a more competent man in his place. Sometimes men may be selected, who, upon trial, do not come up to the anticipations of those who have placed them in power, and other men will exhibit, during the march, more capacity. Under these circumstances, it will not be unwise to make a change, the first election having been distinctly provisional."

"The California Association"

Because of the cost and hazards of the long overland journey to California, few ventured to make the trip except as members of some company similar to those just referred to. Many of these companies were made up of groups of individuals who chanced to be together at the frontier; in many cases the company was composed of friends and neighbors who had pooled their interests before leaving home; in still other cases the association was more closely formed and partook of the nature of a joint stock company bound by legal documents and guarantees.

The articles of agreement and accompanying documents kept by Delos R. Ashley of the California Association and preserved in the Bancroft Library at the University of California provide evidence of the method of organizing one of these companies. Ten men from Monroe County, Michigan, desired to try their fortunes in California. In February, 1849, they met, drew up and signed

a document known as the Articles of Association, which after giving the name of each, declares that they ". . . being about to go to California and feeling fully sensible of the importance of mutual confidence, aid and protection, and the necessity of prudence industry, energy and integrity, And obedience to regulations established by the wisdom and will of the majority of us for our common benefit. Do hereby mutually associate ourselves in joint and equal partnership for the period of two years from our departure from Michigan to be devoted to mining or otherwise getting Gold, or by other more profitable means acquiring property, in the following conditions.

"*First.* We will proceed in company properly armed and supplied before the first day of April next by an overland route to California.

"*Second.* Each one shall aid, protect and defend the other and shall in all things have an honest studious and constant regard to the common interest.

"*Third.* Each one shall labour faithfully in such department of business and under such under [orders] as the majority shall direct.

"*Fourth.* Each one shall fully and faithfully account for and pay or deliver to the Purser, all acquisitions so often as the majority shall direct.

"*Fifth.* Any one may be expelled for misconduct by a vote of not less than two thirds of all the living associates, and being expelled shall be no longer an associate, nor be entitled to any of the rights or privileges of an associate: And all his share of the acquisitions not actually distributed to him, upon his expulsion shall belong to the others.

"*Sixth.* In all other matters a majority of the associates shall continue & such majority shall from time to time make regulations and appoint and prescribe the duties of Captain, a Lieutenant and a pursur.

"*Seventh*. The Purser shall keep a regular brief journal or diary of the expedition including the details of the expenses and acquisitions, which journal shall be read to and be the common property of the company.

"*Eighth*. Each associate who shall actually and in good faith enter upon the journey and his duty to the best of his ability shall be supported at the common expense during the two years and be entitled to his equal tenth share of the net proceeds or gains during the whole expedition wether he be sick or well. Provided that in case any associate shall die during said period, the legal representatives of such associate shall be entitled to the share of such associate up to the time of his death and thereafter to one per cent on the whole net proceeds of said association.

"*Ninth*. In case any associate shall abandon the Company at any time during said period he shall forfeit all rights and privileges of an associate and all his acquisitions and also the Sum of Five Hundred Dollars, and in addition to all legal obligations attaching to the above articles we do hereby each and all severally pledge to each other our Sacred Honor, that will in all things faithfully carry on and abide by all the provissions and conventions in the above articles contained.

"And in witness thereof we have hereto set our hands and seals at Monroe Michigan this Fourteenth day of February A. D. 1849."

Then follow the signatures of the members, one of whom signed by mark.

These frontiersmen were lacking in capital. It appears, however, that they appealed with success to two others to assist them financially. One of these "angels" was Erastus C. Benedict, an attorney of New York City, the other a resident of Monroe, Michigan. With each of these men an agreement was drawn specifying the terms

of the grant of money and the manner of operation on the part of the recipients, as follows:

"We . . . . do hereby jointly and severally covenant with said Benedict that [we] will proceed in company, properly armed and supplied & furnished for the expedition with all practicable dispatch to California setting out before the tenth day of March next and that we will work diligently during the period of Two years according to our articles of association bearing date the Fourteenth day of February, A. D. 1849. And that each and all of us shall give and remit, pay, assign and deliver to said Benedict one Equal Fourth part of all our acquisitions or gains during the whole period after deducting the necessary and reasonable expenses for our support during said period. That his said one fourth part shall be remitted to him from time to time as the same shall be acquired from California direct to the city of New York by the usual safe mode of conveyance and remittance to that city (a Bill of sale, proper news and advices being sent by mail) as often as practicable without waiting for large accumulations. That our Purser or Captain shall write to him by every convenient opportunity during the journey overland and by the first mail after our arriving at any place where there is a mail for New York and at least monthly during the whole period and whenever any remittance is made communicating the amount of acquisitions and such other matters of interest in detail in relation to the expedition as shall give him full information of the Health condition and prospects of the associates."

Having thus secured the necessary funds to finance the expedition, the associates proceeded to draw up a set of by-laws which set forth clearly and definitely the duties of the various officers. It should be noted that these officers were to act not only as in a commercial organization but that they also had extensive powers of a quasi-

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military nature. Because of their importance, the by-laws of the California Association are quoted in full:

"The following by laws, rules and regulations are unanimously adopted under our Articles of Association bearing date of the 14th day of February 1849 the same being adopted at a meeting of the Associates Held at Monroe the Fifth day of March 1849 by the unanimous vote of the associates, and the faithful observance of which [we] sacredly pledge ourselves each to the other.

"*First*. The Captain shall command the company and shall have the full and complete powers of a commander in chief and all the powers which under martial law a commander may exercise & which are not inconsistent with our articles of association except and provided always that he shall have no other or further control over the funds and acquisitions in charge of the Purser, than any other associate under the articles of association.

"*Second*. The Captain shall be elected by a vote of Majority of the Associates, and elected for the full period of Two Years. Provided that the Captain may be removed at any time by the vote of a majority of the associates and in case of his death or resignation a majority should elect from the associates one to fill the vacancy.

"*Third*. The Lieutenant shall be second in Command, and in the absence or sickness or disability of the captain shall have the full powers of captain and shall be elected and removed in the same manner as is provided for the Election & removal of the Captain. And in the case of his death or [resignation] the vacancy shall be filled in the same manner provided for the captain. The Lieutenant shall be inspector of arms and while in the march to California shall report dailly to the Captain.

"*Third* [sic]. The Purser shall have the full and execusion [exclusive] charge and custody of the funds and acquisitions of the company and [shall be] the disbursing

officer. He shall keep a regular journal and diary of all the acts & doings of the company. And shall keep an accurate account of all expenses and disbursements and of all receipts and acquisitions and shall render his account to said Company at least weekly and his journal and accounts of expenses & receipts shall at all times be open to the inspection of every member of said Company. He shall be elected for the full period of Two years in the same way as the Captain, and shall be removed by a vote of two thirds of the living associates and in case of death or resignation the vacancy shall be filled by a vote of the majority of the associates.

"*Fourth.* If a vacancy happens in any of the above named offices from any other cause than is provided above a majority vote shall fill such vacancy.

"*Fifth.* The Captain, Lieutenant and Purser constitute an executive committee to consult, advice, direct and act in all matters that effect the interest of said company with full powers, subject always to the articles of association.

"*Sixth.* All duties on the march in comp. and after arrival in California except the duties of Captain, Lieutenant and Purser (as represented, shall be performed Equally in rotation, and the Captain Lieutenant or Purser) shall not by reason of being officers have any immunities or be exempt from any of the labors, services or duties incumbent upon the members of the company, but shall perform in their turn all duties that may be required of any members.

"*Seventh.* All officers shall be elected by or removed by written ballot.

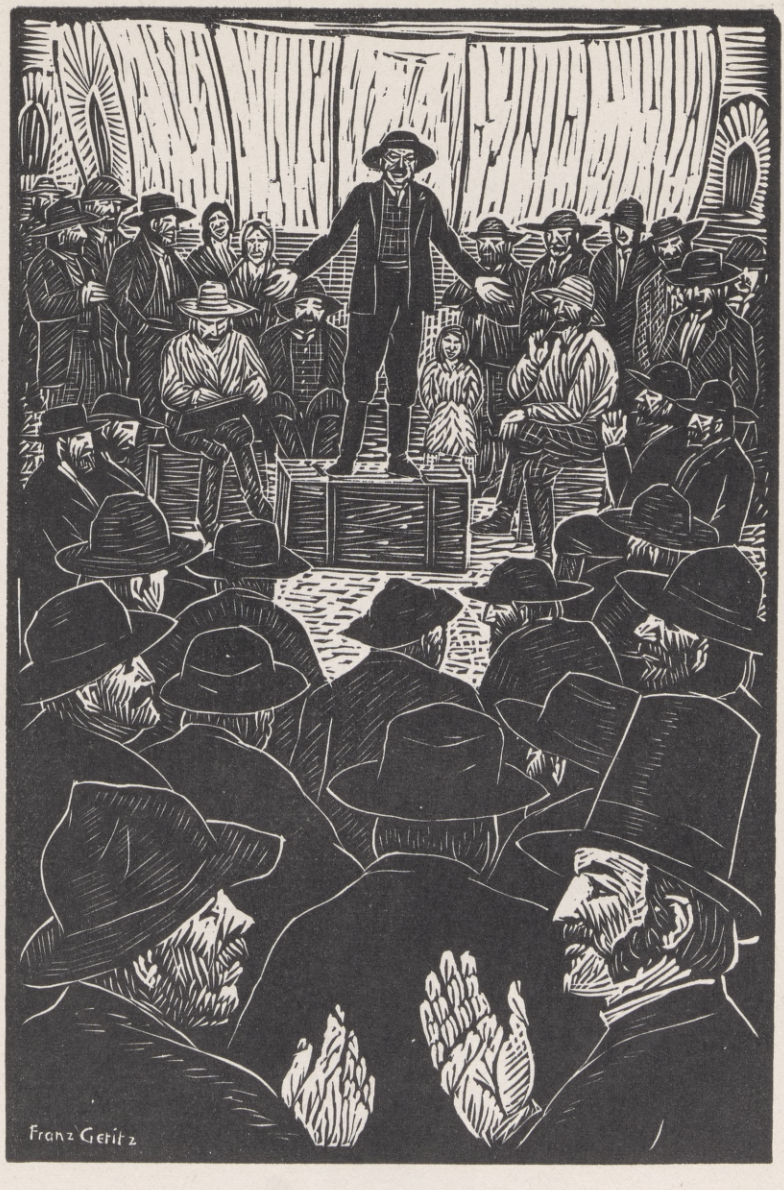
"The above seven by Laws are declared to be inalterable & irrepealable. But it shall be lawful at any time to make such further by laws, rules and regulations as the majority shall determine not inconsistent with our articles of association or the above seven by-laws."

Other Organizations

Although we have here given in considerable detail the documents of a closely organized company, it must not be inferred that all emigrants traveled under such an elaborate organization. The more common practice was for the emigrants who happened to gather at a given frontier point to associate themselves together before starting into the unsettled country. The greater number of them, although accustomed to conditions approximating those of the frontier, were without experience in traveling so great a distance under conditions such as were now before them. It was but natural that they should endeavor to find experienced leaders prepared to direct their advance.

There was a great variety in the form and relative efficiency of the various companies, some being very large, others small, some fully organized, while others left the making of rules until the need should arise.

Many of the companies that had begun the journey without being fully organized soon found the need of some closer bond. In speaking of his experiences upon the Oregon Trail one emigrant writes: "The harmony of feeling, the sameness of purpose, and the identity of interest, which here existed, seemed to indicate nothing, but continued order, harmony and peace, amid all the trying scenes incident to our long and toilsome journey. But we had proceeded only a few days' travel, from our native land of order and security, when the 'American character' was fully exhibited. All appeared to be determined to govern, but not to be governed. Here we were, without law, without order, and without restraint; in a state of nature, amid the confused, revolving fragments of elementary society! Some were sad, while others were merry; and while the brave doubted, the timid


Franz Gerits

trembled! Amid this confusion, it was suggested by our captain, that we 'call a halt,' and pitch our tents, for the purpose of enacting a code of laws, for the future government of the company.

"A committee was, therefore, appointed to draft a code of laws, for the future government of the company. This committee, contrary to the most sanguine expectations of the movers in this affair, reported that, in its opinion, no code of laws was requisite, other than the moral code, enacted by the Creator of the universe, and which is found recorded in the breast of every man. This report was adopted by an overwhelming majority, the consequence of which was, that no code of human laws was enacted; still there appeared to be a strong determination on the part of some, to do something in the way of legislating. In accordance with this determination, a decree was passed, which required the immediate and the indiscriminate extermination of the whole canine race, old and young, male and female, wherever they might be found, within our jurisdiction. This decree was passed by a very small majority, and it gave great dissatisfaction, especially to the owners of the animals whose extermination it contemplated. Those who favored its enforcement, insisted that the subjects of 'the decree of death,' however, athletic they might be, could not possible be taken through, that they would die before they had traveled half the distance; and that, by their incessant barking and howling, they would notify the Indians of our locality when encamped. On the other hand, it was insisted, that, if they died on the way, that would be the loss of the owners, and, consequently, their business; and that if they did notify the Indians of our position, they would also notify us of theirs; and hence, the conclusion was drawn, that the advantages more than counterbalanced the disadvantages. Notwithstanding this conclusion,

several dogs were slain under the inconsiderate decree, when the opposition became more general and determined. The owners of the most valuable mastiffs now declared in the most positive terms, that 'if any man should kill their dogs, they would kill him, regardless of all consequences.' The 'dog killers,' however, now went out 'armed and equipped,' as the decree required, with a full determination to discharge their *honorable* and *dangerous* duty; but they were promptly met by the owners, who were also armed and equipped, and prepared for any emergency. At this important crisis, the captain thought proper to convene the company again, in its legislative capacity, which being done, the dog decree, as it was called, was almost unanimously abrogated."

If there were some companies that had not made their organization as complete as they should have done, there were also those who went to the other extreme. Delano gives an account of a company from Tennessee, described to him by Colonel Joseph S. Watkins, of Memphis, whom he met by chance upon the trail. He says: "They were seventy strong, having a republican and military form of government, a constitution and by-laws, a president and vice-president, a legislature, three judges, and court of appeals, nine sergeants, as well as other officers, who, by their laws, were to be exempted from the performance of camp duty by virtue of their dignified stations—leaving it for the plebeians and common soldiers to do the drudgery of camp duty, and of standing guard at night. All this read very well on paper, and quite to the satisfaction of those who were to be exempt from labor, but reduced to practice, it was not strange that it produced murmuring, which ripened into actual rebellion. Thinking it smacked too much of favoritism and aristocracy, the Colonel petitioned the legislature for an amendment of the constitution, which, after much discussion, was

decided to be out of order, as it was not presented in due form by an honorable member of that august body; and no member was found willing to present a petition which compromised his own privilege. This led to an open rupture, and the Colonel withdrew, after holding up the folly of their course to view, followed by thirteen wagons, and which finally ended in the dissolution of the government of the traveling republic, whose legitimate business it was to guard against the thieving Indians. Thus this sublime government fell by the weight of its own machinery and exclusive privileges."

Camp Routine

When a company had been properly equipped and organized by election of captain and other officers it was ready to set out on the Great Trek. In a well regulated company the order of march, time of starting and going into camp, as well as the place of encampment, were the special responsibilities of the captain. Delano gives this picture of the encamped company as he overtook it the first night out from the Missouri River:

"A little before night-fall, on rising a hill, I came suddenly in sight of the encampment of our company, consisting of seventeen wagons and fifty men, all of whom were from the neighborhood of Ottawa. They were encamped in a hollow, near a fine spring, and putting Old Shab to his best gait, in three minutes I stood among my friends, with a glorious appetite to partake of their savory supper of bacon, bread and coffee. They had made about fifteen miles. Soon after my arrival, all hands were summoned, by the blast of the bugle, for the purpose of adopting general rules for mutual safety in travelling and also to detail a guard for the night. . . ."

He then describes the manner in which the company advanced each day: "Our company was well arranged

and provided for the great journey before us. Every wagon was numbered, and our captain, with the concurrence of the members of the company, directed that each wagon should in turn take the lead for one day, and then, falling in the rear, give place to the succeeding number, and so on, alternately, till the whole seventeen advanced in turn. Every mess was provided with a portable light cook stove, which, though not absolutely necessary, was often found convenient, on account of the scarcity of fuel; each man was well armed with a rifle, pistol, and knife, with an abundant supply of ammunition, and each mess had a good and substantial tent. Each wagon was drawn by from three to six yoke of good cattle; and it was agreed that they should be prudently driven, for we could well anticipate the helplessness of our condition, should our cattle give out on the plains, where they could not be duplicated. To prevent their being stolen by the Indians, or straying at night, a watch was set while they were feeding; and at dark they were driven in and tied to the wagons, where they were constantly under the supervision of the night guard; and it is owing to this watchfulness and care, that we lost none by Indians throughout the trip.

"Before the sun-rise the cattle were driven out to graze, and all hands were astir, and some engaged in that business of life, cooking breakfast. The wagons formed a circle, outside of which the tents were pitched, so that had thieves been disposed to get at our valuables, they would have been compelled to pass into the inner circle, under the eyes of the guard; and in case of an attack, the wagons would form a barricade."

Captains Good and Bad

A good captain was not easily found. He should be an experienced frontiersman who could readily recognize and

prepare for danger from Indians or storms, a man who could select good camping places and in the arid region could tell signs of water. He must be tactful in dealing with men and one who could command respect.

Unfortunately mistakes were sometimes made in the selection of the captain, and trouble ensued. In the rush to the gold fields during the days of 'forty-nine most men did not know their companions well, and there was little time for study of their qualifications. The capable men did not assert their superiority, with the result that less qualified ones were often selected as leaders, and it was not until the real dangers and hardships were encountered that the qualities of superiority became apparent. It is fortunate that inefficient captains were not more numerous, for in many cases the lives and property of the train depended upon the ability and good judgment of its leader. An amusing example of a less capable captain is the case of Dobbins, leader of a company which was under way along the Humboldt River. When the alarm of "Indians!" was given, the whole company immediately rallied to withstand the attack and the savages were repelled without serious loss. Mrs. Helen M. Carpenter tells how the camp was thrown into confusion because of the apparent loss of their captain.

"When the stock was well into camp," she writes, "it was noticed that Dobbins (the captain) was not with the others. Where was Dobbins? All had been so intent on saving the stock that no individual had been thought of. Where was Dobbins? He was found just as far back in one of his wagons as he could get, and there he sat with two guns. When asked why he did not go to help with the stock, he replied that it was not safe to go and leave the women and children alone. The idea was all right, no one else had thought of it, not even the women and

children themselves, yet they were quite as safe without him as with him."

The position of captain in one of these overland companies was, at best, far from enviable. The men of the organization were a group of individuals bound together only by the slender bond of advantage to themselves. Therefore, whenever they felt that independent action would bring greater advantage or free them from irksome tasks or restraint, the spirit of insubordination became manifest.

"Truly there is no better school for testing a man's temper," says Josiah Gregg in writing of the Santa Fé caravans, "than the command of a promiscuous caravan of independent traders. The rank of captain is, of course, but little more than nominal. Every proprietor of a two-horse wagon is apt to assume as much authority as the commander himself, and to issue his orders without the least consultation at head-quarters. It is easy then to conceive that the captain has anything but an enviable berth. He is expected to keep order while few are disposed to obey—loaded with execrations for every mishap, whether accidental or otherwise; and when he attempts to remonstrate he only renders himself ridiculous, being entirely without power to enforce his commands. It is to be regretted that some system of 'maritime law' has not been introduced among these traders to secure subordination, which can never be attained while the commander is invested with no legal authority. For my own part, I can see no reason why the captain of a prairie caravan should not have as much power to call his men to account for disobedience or mutiny, as the captain of a ship upon the high seas."

From time to time during the journey it became necessary for the emigrants to assume the functions of legislators and administrators of justice. These assemblies and

courts of the plains were crude in form of procedure but nevertheless served their purpose in the preservation of order.

Court on the Plains

"While I am writing," observed Edwin Bryant, "a public meeting is being held in the area of the corral. There is much speaking and voting upon questions appertaining to the enforcement of by-laws, and regulations heretofore adopted, but rarely enforced. We are a pure democracy. All laws are proposed directly to a general assembly, and are enacted or rejected by a majority. The court of arbitrators, appointed to decide disputes between parties, and to punish offenders against the peace and order of the company, does not appear to have much authority. The party condemned is certain to take an appeal to an assembly of the whole, and he is nearly as certain of an acquittal, whatever may have been his transgressions."

Bryant records further that: "At eight o'clock, A. M., an adjourned meeting of the company was held in the *corral*, to hear and act upon a report of a committee, appointed by the meeting last night, to draw up additional regulations for our government during the journey. As usual in these assemblies, violent language was used, producing personal altercation and much excitement. A motion having been made by one of the company, to appoint a standing committee to try the officers, when charged with tyranny or neglect of duty by any individual of the party, it was carried; whereupon all the officers announced their resignations, and we were thrown back into our original elements, without a head and without organization. I felt fully satisfied that a large majority of the emigrants composing our party were in favor of order, and a restraining exercise of authority on the part of their officers, and that they had voted without understanding

the effects which must follow the measure adopted. Not having participated in the proceedings of the meeting previously, I moved a reconsideration of the vote just taken, and explained the reasons therefor. My motion was carried by a large majority; the resolution raising the standing committee was rescinded, and the officers who had just resigned were re-elected by acclamation! These matters I describe with some minuteness, because they illustrate emigrant life while on the road to the Pacific, where no law prevails except their will. So thoroughly, however, are our people imbued with conservative republican principles, and so accustomed are they to order and propriety of deportment, that with a fair understanding, a majority will always be found on the side of right, and opposed to disorganization. Our glorious constitution is their motto and their model, and they will sanction nothing in derogation of the principles of the American constitution and American justice. There, are, however, men in all emigranting parties, desperate and depraved characters, who are perpetually endeavoring to produce discord, disorganization, and collision; and after a proper organization, of a party, as few public assemblages as possible should be convened for legislative purposes."

Centrifugal Forces

Because of the nature of these companies, they could scarcely be expected to be permanent, for as the journey proceeded and the hardships became more difficult, the spirit of cooperation waned.

"On leaving the Missouri," says Delano, "nearly every train was an organized company, with general regulations for mutual safety, and with a captain chosen by themselves, as a nominal head. On reaching the South Pass, we found that the great majority had either divided, or broken up entirely, making independent and helter-skel-

ter marches towards California. Some had divided from policy, because they were too large, and on account of the difficulty of procuring grass in one place for so many cattle, while others, disgusted by the overbearing propensities of some men, would not endure it, and others still, from mutual ill-feelings and disagreements among themselves. Small parties of twenty men got along decidedly the best; and three men to a mess, or wagon, is sufficient for safety as well as harmony."

For those who followed the southern trails, the valley of the Rio Grande offered the first chance to disband the organization and to form new associations, and few were the companies that were strong enough to continue all the way to California. This spirit of disorganization affected everyone, but was most noticeable among the companies organized at the frontier from the groups already gathered there, while those made up of emigrants from some particular town or county, knowing one another in advance of the embarkation upon this journey, were more likely to be permanent.

The later experiences of the California Association are so representative that it may be profitable to follow them more in detail. This is easily done from the full reports kept by Delos R. Ashley, purser of the company. The journey to Fort Laramie was made without any incidents to disturb the company. But at that point were heard the first rumblings of discontent. Since there seemed to be a lack of harmony, a formal meeting of the company was called. The first action taken was to lighten the load. One wagon which had shown the ill effects of the trip was discarded and the twelve animals hitched to the remaining two wagons. Provisions were reduced to forty pounds of bacon and five pounds of lard per man. This was packed in a small keg but all other articles were placed in bags so that trunks and chests might be eliminated.

While the results of this meeting did not satisfy everyone, no serious rupture occurred until they had passed the Sink of the Humboldt. There the captain lost patience with the men and vowed his intention to resign from command and from the company as soon as they reached California. The purser desired to resign immediately but could not do so because the captain failed to call a meeting. Open threats of dissolution were made and as soon as the worst of the desert was crossed the captain called a meeting and resigned. The official record reads as follows:

"9 A. M. [Saturday, July 28, 1849.] Capt. called a meeting of the Co. and resigned. It was accepted. A motion was made to proceed to the election of captain—lost. Voted we admit no authority but that of our own officers on the route. We leave Russell's train. Lieu. Stevens acting as Capt.—with Bulk [Bulkley]—Wilson tried to raise a row but failed."

As the party was crossing the ridge of the Sierra Nevada and approached the gold fields, discipline became more difficult. Dismemberment of the company was seen to be imminent, and as soon as the gold mines were reached various individuals detached themselves from the group. Some of the members, however, kept together for several months. Just one year after the organization of the company, the entry in Ashley's record is as follows:

"March 6—1850. It is now one year since we left home. Our Co. is all broken up—Stevens and myself are at San Jose & I do not know where the rest are. None of them have reported for months past."

The final entry is that of April 16, reading thus:

"I am going to the mines I have nothing to do in San Jose. Stevens will remain here at work, he takes the lot in San Jose—he gives me money to go with and I suppose the lot will be lost. From this time Stevens and myself will do as the rest do. Go on our own hook

"All is lost an the Company is dissolved and I shall no longer keep a record."

Although few companies remained intact during the whole of the long journey, this does not imply that the company form of organization was not successful. Of course, many such groups disbanded because of the weaknesses inherent in human nature or conflicts in personality which made it impossible for certain members to work in harmony. It should be borne in mind that these men were undertaking a terrific task absolutely new to them, in which experience was the only guide to success.

Many companies proved too large, and when trying to operate as a unit could not find sufficient water and feed for themselves and their stock. Obviously these could divide with advantage. At times it was found that some could travel faster than others and that no great hardship could come to any members if they divided according to their ability to proceed. Judgment of the success of the organized emigrant company must therefore not be determined by the fact that such organizations were often changed or set aside. They should be judged by their effectiveness during the period of their existence. They were experiments in democracy and while some proved inadequate to meet all the emergencies, the very ease with which the members could dissolve their bonds and form new associations without lawlessness and disorder proves the true democratic spirit among the American frontiersmen rather than the opposite. It was upon the plains, deserts and mountain valleys that the men of 'Forty-nine learned the lessons in self government that later gave them the ability to form laws for the mining districts of the Sierra Nevada and to evolve a government for the new State of California.

Chapter V

CHAPTER V

Up the Platte to South Pass

With the spring of 1849, frontiersmen of the great Mississippi Valley, with many others from the interior states, sought passage along the Platte River through the Rocky Mountains at South Pass. The overland route from Missouri up the Platte to California was already well established. Early fur traders, Oregon emigrants, the Frémont expeditions, and the Mormons in their trek to the Salt Lake Basin had all used this route, which was rapidly becoming a great highway. These earlier travelers had developed two trails along the Platte, also sometimes called the Nebraska River. The one followed by emigrants to Oregon went along the south side of the stream; the other, the Mormon Trail, kept along the north bank.

These trails began at the Missouri River, which in 1849 marked the boundary between the settled area and the Indian Country. Independence and St. Joseph, in Missouri, and Council Bluffs and Kanesville, in Iowa, north of the Platte, were the usual points of departure. During the spring of 1849 all those places became thriving cities of canvas as the oncoming hordes of 'Forty-niners crowded to the American frontier.

From either Independence or St. Joseph the trail led

westward across and along the Kansas River or its tributaries and reached the Platte in the vicinity of Grand Island. Those following this route began to encounter difficulties when they came to the Platte River, for treacherous quicksands often caught the unwary. To travelers by the Kanesville trail the crossing of the Elkhorn and Loup branches of the Platte gave similar trouble, for when the streams were high rafts or boats became necessary or temporary bridges had to be constructed.

From Grand Island the trails followed the river closely, one on the southern, the other on the northern bank. The stream furnished the needed water through the otherwise barren plain. Along its margins were grass for the animals and fuel for camp fires. Four hundred and fifty miles the emigrants plodded their way to Fort Laramie, located on the south side of the river just above the mouth of the Laramie River.

Against many odds the emigrants struggled on up the Platte to the Sweetwater River. Since this tributary of the Platte enters the main stream directly from the west it logically became the route of the emigrant trains. The trail followed up its narrow valley, crossing and recrossing as the nature of the country demanded, until at last, almost without warning, the traveler found himself upon the waters flowing to the Pacific Ocean. He had reached the famous South Pass, about one thousand miles from the mouth of the Platte River.

The Departure

No mere description of the route can portray the story of the great migration as well as it is told in the words of those who came across the plains at that time. Many interesting diaries have been preserved, but that of Dr. E. A. Tompkins, who journeyed up the Platte in the emigration of 1850, is particularly illuminating. The following

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extracts from his hitherto unpublished diary present this material in Dr. Tompkins's unmodified words:

"On Sunday the 28th of April we landed at Wayne City the most miserable of all wretched collections of log huts that were ever inhabited by pickpockets, grog venders and vagabonds of every shade, name and nature. Here we remained all night and in the morning hired our baggage taken to the City of Independence which lays in the midst of the most beautiful country imaginable, 3 miles from river.

". . . . We remain[ed] at the City of Independence above one week. We then went out to the frontiers about 22 miles west. Here we remained about two weeks and had a fine opportunity of viewing the country, which is beautifully diversified with hill and dale, grove and prarie. It is a singurly wild and enchanting region, It only wants the company of friends to make it the most charming and happy place in the world. I resided while here with Moses T. Wells Esqr. by whom I was treated with the utmost kindness, with gratitude with esteem. On Tuesday the 22d of May we set out from the frontier on our expedition acrost the plains to the Rocky Mountains. The following detail of the usages of travel is peculiar to such as pack their sustenance on mules. In the morning as soon as it was light we called up all hands. Some would attend to the cooking and others to the packing of the animals.

"Our meal in the morning consisted of fried ham or bacon, coffee and crackers, all of which could be quite readily prepared.

"Our packing began by placing a part of our blankets on the back of the mules, then our pack saddles were fastened on our mules very firmly after which the burdens belonging to each were carefully adjusted, and fastened over which was spread an oilcloth and carefully confined.

Great care was observed to prevent making the backs of our animals sore. At noon we unpacked our animals and let them feed an hour or two, at sunset or before we halted for the night. When night came we pitched our tents, unpacked our animals and then picketed them, that is we fastened them to a peg driven in the ground and attached to the animal by means of a rope about 33 feet long, called a 'Larriette.' At night we guarded our animals against the thieving Indians, each taking turns in that arduous duty. Our place of repose was under a tent with an oil cloth and a blanket under us and two or three over us. We soon got so used to it that no trouble arose from such fare. Indeed we would have given but little to choose between the fare we then had and that we had been used to. The only cause of unhappiness was separation from those we loved. Alas the thoughts of the loved ones far away would often bring tears to the eyes in spite of every effort to resist them. The first Indian Territory we entered was that of the Shawnees, a mere remnant of a tribe along this border of the Missouri. Indeed thirty-six miles of beautiful plain took us through the region they inhabited. I think it is 36 miles or thereabout from the Missouri State line to the Wakerussi [Wakarusa River] which I am told is the western limit of the Shawnee Territory. The Territory of the Shawnees abounds in beautiful plains of alluvial soil. Enchanting streams meander through the midst of vallies that seperate gentle hills, beautiful groves are interspersed through the country and charming flowers adorn the grass covered hills, vallies, and plains all of which are cheered by the incessant music of myriads and beautiful feathered songsters.

"From morning until night the eye and ear is cheered by an incessant round of diversified beauty and melody."

The Indian Country

"After leaving the Shawnees we came to the Kansas Indians or 'Kaws' as they are uniformly called in this region. These wretches inhabit a country about 40 miles wide. The Territory belonging to these Indians is quite as beautiful as that belonging to the Shawnees, indeed on some accounts more so. The hills are more lofty and encircled near their summits with a horizontal line of protuding rocks in which are imbeded the bony remains of sea animals indicating these lines to have been the shore of an ancient sea.

"The Kansas Indians are a race of exceedingly degraded beings. They are lazy, filthy, thievish, lieing vagabonds. They go without any clothes at least more than half of them and those that are covered at all, are but partially so, and that by a blanket thrown over their shoulders. Many of them obtain quite a livelihood by begging from emigrants. They make use of every pretext imaginable to filch money from emigrants. . . .

"On the 29th day of May we crossed the Kansas River by the aid of a Ferry kept by a Frenchman. This Ferry is kept by a man who is tolerably well acquainted with all the peculiarities of the Indians. This post is about 135 miles from that part of the Missouri frontier from whence we set out. The River is about one fourth of a mile wide and is exceedingly rappid and deep. Ten miles west of this ferry brings us to a Methodist Mission where the Potowatomies are taught in all the arts of civilized life. This Mission is in a very prosperous condition and has from 225 to 470 pupils. A Roman Catholic Mission exists near the River at Kansasville where we crossed.

"The territory of the Potowatomies extends west to the Little Vermillion River about 28 miles west of the Kansas River. A few miles farther on bring us to the Big Vermil-

lion River in which fish abounds and wild peas may also be gathered on its banks, which are nearly one mile apart and mostly covered with Cotton Wood trees some of which were very large. The banks of Little and Big Vermillion are so steep and high that ropes are necessary in leting down wagones or taking them up from the valley between them. Though the valley is so wide of Big Vermillion the stream is but little over two rods wide. The banks of the Little Vermillion are not near as far apart as those of the Big Vermillion. We encamped on the night of May 19th on the bank of the Little Vermillion in company with about 75 emigrants. The Plains were vast and feed for our mules abundant. . . ."

The Big and Little Blue

"About twenty five miles farther west brings the traveller to the Big Blue River which is about 10 rods wide and so deep that floats or rafts are indispensible for crossing it with wagons and baggage. Several persons are drounded at this crossing every year. At the time we crossed I should judge that full 300 men, women and children were assembled at the point where all deemed it the place for building their rude ferries. At least 500 head of Cattle and 1,000 Horses and Mules were endevouring to pass over, and such horrid noises caused by the braying of Asses, lowing of Oxen, schreaming of women and children with the fiendish cursing and swearing shouted in all languages by furious madmen was enough to becraze the greatest stoic in all Christendom. It seemed that no one was able to howl loud enough to hear his own voice."

Just west of the Big Blue River, the trails from St. Joseph and Fort Leavenworth came into the Independence trail taken by Dr. Tompkins. The nature of the country along these two trails was very similar to that described in the Tompkins journal.

"*The 'Little Blue,'* " continues the doctor, "lays about thirty miles west of the Big Blue. It is a beautiful meandering stream varying from 20 to 75 feet in width and from 3 to 10 feet in depth. The water is clear and abounds in the most beautiful fish such as salmon, suckers and a large variety of other kinds. The banks of this stream are covered with a forest of Cotton Wood which is almost entirely unbroken as far as the eye can reach. The *Soil* between the 'Big' and the 'Little Blue' is exceedingly fertile and beautifully diversified with hills and vallies. The scenery is truly delightful. Sickness prevailed to a great extent along the 'Little Blue'. . . .

"As the Traveller approaches the Platte River the land is observed to stretch out in one wide plain like the surface of a vast lake, ultimately however he passes through a low barrier of beautiful sand hills about 4 miles from the river. These sand hills which at first are perhaps 20 feet high soon begin to present more and more elevated points until they finally range between 40 and 600 feet high. This range of hills varies from 2 to 10 miles in their proximity to the river and on them may be seen and heard a very lofty headed and beautiful bird called the Sand-Hill Crane, thousands of which prevade that region and keep up a constant noise quite similar to that of wild geese when flying."

Fort Kearney

"The first trace of civilization which the Traveller meets with this wild and strange region is *Fort Kearny*, which is indeed no fortification but a rude garrison for the fragments of three companies of soldiers, one of the companies are the remains of an old company of mounted men a kind of Dragoons. Their habitations consist of a kind of sod brick, or sods cut into the shape of bricks and heaped up after the form of a wall. Of such materials are

the bodies of their buildings constructed and indeed the roof is made of the same material and placed on poles and brush. The floor is of solid earth. The quarters of officers are a little more aristocratic being a fine two story building. The object of this garrison is said to overawe the Indians of this region of the U. S. Territories and thus protect the emigrant.

"The land in the vicinity of the fort is of a very poor quality indeed yet they succeed in raising some culinary vegetables for the consumption among themselves.

"Leaving Fort Kearney we proceed westward and soon arrived on the banks of the great Platte River. The point at which we touched the Platte is perhaps 30 miles from the source of the 'Little Blue' and nearly opposite *Grand Island*. This Island as near as I could judge is 30 miles long and divides the river nearly equally. It is covered with beautiful groves of Cotton Wood and gives to the eye an exceedingly grand and picturesque appearance. The Island I am told varies from a few rods to 4 or 5 miles in width. The *Platte River* varies from one quarter to one and a half miles in width and from 3 to 15 feet in depth. It is very swift and turbid, but the water when allowed to settle is most excellent though surrounded by saline springs the qualities of which are exceedingly destructive to health. The River is full of quicksands and varies in its depths so much that on undertaking to cross it a man though in shallow water in one instant may the next plunge into a depth of 10 or 15 feet and these vicissitudes may accur every few moments or half a dozen times in crossing once. The grass of the valley through which the river runs is exceedingly luxuriant. . . .

"Up to this point we never found any difficulty in obtaining good camping places and plenty of wood but here we find ourselves beginning to be destitute of wood and obliged to use the excrement of Buffaloes in making a

fire to cook our food. This kind of fuel is very plenty along the Platte and makes a very hot fire when properly fixed for burning."

The Mormon Trail

At Fort Kearney the road from Independence came close to the route which ran along the north side of the Platte and for the distance of about three hundred miles the two ran parallel. The north trail was known as the Mormon Trail because of its use during the great Mormon emigration of 1847 and the years following. The journey along the Mormon Trail was in most ways similar to that on the Independence road. It crossed the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, or Kanesville, and led across the rolling prairie to the valley of the Platte. When streams were crossed, especially the Elkhorn and Loup rivers, trouble was encountered from swollen waters which required ferrying in the wet season, and from quicksands when attempts were made to ford them. Just above Fort Kearney emigrant parties often chose to cross the Platte, either to the north or to the south side, but in general the trains continued along the side upon which they approached the river until the upper waters were reached. Crossings were also made near the confluence of the North and South Platte at Fort Laramie, at which point the trails joined for the rough journey through the Black Hills.

Lemuel Clark McKeeby, in his *Memoirs*, gives an account of the route along the north side of the Platte as his party found it in May of 1850. A journey of fifteen miles from the Missouri River camp brought them to Elkhorn River where they found a ferry for their wagon and swam their horses across. From this stream a half day's drive brought them to the Platte River. Three or more days were consumed in driving up the Platte and its Loup Fork. The latter was crossed at a ford. Of this

crossing McKeeby says, "The river here is about a half mile wide with quicksand bed, and the only way to make the crossing is by keeping the team on the move."

The journey along the north bank of the Platte afforded no particular interest in natural features, for it was through the open country between the prairies and the Great Plains. A week's journey brought the travelers nearly opposite the Independence trail which approached the river from the southeast, and the author upon seeing the great procession across the river exclaims, "It was perfectly wonderful to note the hundreds of teams on the road to California," and a few days later, while encamped for a Sunday's rest, he writes:

"As we lay here upon the north side of the Platte and contemplate that the road on our side of the river for miles ahead are lined with teams [and] from our camp to the Missouri behind us is one continuous line of wagons, and when we look opposite us on the other side of the river, we behold one long string of teams as far as the eye can reach both up and down the river for miles, for the country here is one vast plain of level land with a stretch of willows running through it indicating the course of the river, and think what a vast army of horses and cattle are pressing forward to one goal over one road, we are constrained to ask ourselves what will be the outcome; can those in the rear hope to get feed for their stock. We must be comparatively early in this exodus and to keep in the advance column we must press forward or our teams may be pressed for feed."

Turning again to the main road from Independence we follow the trip of Dr. Tompkins from Fort Kearney.

Up the Platte

"We steadily pursued our way onward up the Platte about 120 miles as near as I could judge from the place

where we touched the river first. This brought us to the confluence of the north and south forks of the Platte. The valley thus far had been a continued scene of matchless beauty and the hills continue to become more lofty and grand as we proceed westward.

"Sickness began to prevail on every hand and the river was almost completely lined by tents containing the sick and dying. The scene was truly terriffic. All of which we think might have been avoided by cleanliness and care. . . .

"We continued our journey up the South fork 60 or 70 miles as near as we could judge. The same beautiful valley continuing on, on, on, more and more grand, more wild and thrilling in its magnificence by ascending to the top of one of the mountains bordering the valley the eye was made to behold a boundless ocean of billowy mountains with ghastly casams interveneing and surmounted with here and there a stunted cedar standing silent and alone like the mast of small yacht that had been lost at sea while buffeting a furious tempest. The scene is so strange, so wild, so grand that the beholder is at once overwhelmed with astonishment and rapture. Having wandered thus far (60 or 70 miles) up the south fork we prepared to cross over. The Crossing of the South Fork formed an important era in our journey. As we neared the spot where we designed to cross we observed at least 400 waggons on the bank and at least 3,000 oxen and other animals. The shouting and halloing combined with the bawling of the cattle made a confusion of stuning sounds that rendered talking to each other almost impossible.

"It was on the 15th day of June, the water was high and consequently we found it quite impossible to ford the river without swimming our horses as we rode them. Hundreds of Ox teams and droves of cattle were waiting

in the act of crossing. Others in attempting to do so were often thrown into confusion, some would become unyoked or get the chains over their backs instead of between them, and some would turn their heads in the opposite direction to that in which they desired to go. The waggons would swing about in the deep water, or one end would be almost out of water while the other was under. Often they would be submerged, and their contents greatly injured, or they would upset and thus destroy all they contained or float away with it to parts hitherto unexplored. In this way, Cattle, Waggons and provisions have been lost forever and their owners left perfectly destitute. Indeed instances are not unfrequent in which the owners loose their lives by drowning in attempting to rescue their property or escape from it. The stream is more than half a mile in width and is very rappid and turbid where the emigrants cross. There are three or four crossing places above and below where we are but this is thought to be the best. After a crossing is effected much time is usually required in preparing, drying, repacking and trying to save damaged provisions.

"Having crossed however and spent a day or two in refixing our goods we set out to cross the mountains laying between the south and north forks of the Platte.

"The distance at this point is 22 miles and over a region of country that keeps the traveller in a state of constant wonder and increasing enchantment, 'Hills peep over hills and Alps on Alps arise.' The Hills are exceedingly steep and deep gorges between them look truly awful. The sublimity of the scene is too great for me to describe. The towers of rocks, the interminable gorges, the dreadful passes, and casams strikes the coldest stoic with awe and reverential admiration of an Almightie's power. Near the summit of the route or rather the mountains is a Lake around which numerous Bears and Wolves are daily seen

to congregate. These animals seem not devoted exclusively to the lofty hills and mountains but prevade all portions of this region. I counted 14 Bears around the Little Lake above alluded to. Our passage down from the summit of the mountains terminated in a tremendous defile that passes up between lofty hills on the south side of 'North Fork.' This defile is called 'Ash Hollow.' "

Court House and Chimney Rocks

The peculiar geological formations greatly impressed the travelers. Some of them were given special names such as Court House Rock, and Chimney Rock. Above these the highlands known as Scotts Bluffs encroached so close upon the channel of the river that the emigrant trail was forced to leave the stream for a short distance. Dr. Tompkins thus continues his account of the journey:

"The whole country seems overspread by the ruins of some of the loftiest and most magnificent pallaces the imagination of man can reach in its most extravagant conceptions. Here lays the ruins of a lofty Pyramid, there a splendid castle. On one hand is a tremendous citidal, on the other the grand hall of legislation. Yonder is the facsimile of our nations' capitol at Washington and there again is the City Hall at N. Y., only enlarged perhaps a dozen times or more.

"On all sides lay the ruins of more grandeur than man has ever had a conception of. Even the ruins of Rome, Athens, Bagdad and Petria fall into perfect insignificance by the side of these apparent ruins of a city that must have been inhabited by Giants.

"It is in vain to attempt a description of those enchanting wonders. Even the strange creations of fancy which gives to Alladdin's Lamp such wonder-working powers could never display to the dreamy mind a tenth of such astonishing grandeur as is displayed on those places where

nature has made such mocking of the works of Art. 'Scotts Bluffs' are so called from a man by the name of Scott who formed one of a company of fir traders who abandoned him at this place when sick and unable to assist himself. Here Scott died, far, far away from home and friends surrounded by fiendish savages and all the wild romance of capricious nature's fanciful freaks. O, it was a wild and lonely, aye a desolate place in which to die. Here he breathed his last sigh alone with nature's glooms and with nature's God.

"The emigrant road passes to the left of Scott's Bluffs (as we proceed westward) and leads to, and through a beautiful plain affording every possible facility for grazing and rest. Here we remained one day. At the west end of this valley lives a blacksmith by the name of Thibbadoux who has 3 squaws he calls his wives and a numerous progeny is the result of this association. This man is evidently of French descent and a desperado.

"We now find ourselves among the *Sioux tribe of Indians*, they are very numerous indeed and by far the noblest of all the tribes of North American Indians. Many of their squaws have a right to claim some pretension to beauty. . . . The Sioux are apparently far superior in all the characteristics that dignify an Indian race. They are brave, warlike, magnanimous, proud and dignified in their bearing. They are of noble stature and boast of never sheding the blood of white man. This boast is perhaps without foundation. They treated us very politely and appeared to have very great respect for the wisdom and power of the Whites. We often ventured alone among them and treated them with great familiarity. They could come to our camps show us their Arms, Equipments, trinkets, etc. Many think the Sioux women handsome but I confess I could not make myself believe they were even tolerable."

Franz Geritz '29

Fort Laramie

"As we continued on our weary way (having rested one day at Scott's Bluffs) we soon came in sight of Laramie Peak, one of the very highest prominences of the spurs of the Rocky Mountains which project eastward. This point can be seen full 150 miles and perhaps much farther, it is situated a few miles west of Fort Laramie (20 I think) and is nearly always crowned with snow. It is a little over 11,000 feet above the level of the sea. While viewing Laramie Peak from the first point from which it is observable we find ourselves on an elevation which seems verily like the very back-bone of creation, but we soon descend in our passage westward to Horse Creek, then over a sandy and desolate country for a space of 8 or 10 miles when we come near the river again. About 70 miles from Scott's Bluffs brings us to 'Fort Bernard.'

" 'Fort Bernard' is merely an assemblage of Log Huts constructed for a trading post and occupied as such by those engaged in trading with the Indians. Two large stacks of Buffalo skins stood near the fort and were as large and appeared very much like the hay stacks of our Eastern States. I was very sick when I arrived at this place and suffered all a man could suffer from Cholick. People at the fort supposed I had Cholera and Premtorily directed my companions to take me away. I went on some two miles and a shower threatened us and we held up and erected our tents. I took some Ginger tea made by Mr. Parker and soon became better. We remained here during the rest of the day having traveled only about 8 miles. The next morning was the 23rd day of June and Sunday. But we set out for Fort Laramie which was only 8 miles distant. Before we arrived at the Fort we found ourselves obliged to cross the Laramie river, a deep and rappid stream. We hired the owner of a wagon to take our goods

over while we rode our animals. We arrived at the fort about 10 o'clock A. M. . . . It is a very miserable apology for a fort being a quadrangular structure of sun dried bricks about 10 feet high and perhaps 40 by 120 feet square. The walls vary from 18 to 10 inches in thickness.

"A kind of enclosure nearly 4 miles in extent appeared designed for surrounding this mockery of a military post, stationed here for the purpose of overaweing the Indians whenever they threaten to become refractory. It would seem that a company of squaws could sack the whole concern in half an hour if they knew its weakness. Its walls are actually proped up by sticks of timber all of which will as surely fall of itself in three years as it now stands. No famishing emigrant can hope to obtain a loaf of bread from this place at any price. A large bakery however is here for the use of the government pets alone. We left the fort about 3 o'clock p. m., and went to Warm Springs a distance of 12 miles."

Fort Laramie supplied a welcome change from the monotony of the long trek. This fort had been established in 1834 as a post for American fur traders, but had been taken over by the United States government. In 1849 it was occupied by two companies of soldiers. At the army store were to be found a limited supply of sugar, tea, coffee, salt, and a few medicines which were sold at what seemed to the emigrants exorbitant prices.

Through the Black Hills

Here the trail entered the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and the uneven road made progress more difficult. Many weary travelers became totally discouraged at the prospect before them and here chose to terminate their westward trek before disaster befell them. Hundreds of them, after withstanding the hardships of the journey across the plains, returned from Fort Laramie to their

eastern homes. Only those with stoutest hearts continued on toward the Land of Gold.

The trip had already begun to tell, too, upon the worn draft animals, so occasion was taken here to adjust their loads. Trunks, chests, guns and mining implements, together with great quantities of surplus supplies—bacon and hard bread—were thrown away or left piled by the wayside. Some were determined that no one else should profit by their misfortune and so destroyed these articles before leaving them; flour and sugar were made unfit for use; wagons and equipment were burned. Others carefully placed their goods by the side of the road with a note inviting later comers to help themselves. Thus were differences in human nature made evident. This lightening of the loads was deemed necessary if the remaining journey across the mountains and deserts was to be accomplished in the time required. And it was well that the emigrant thus prepared himself for the further pursuit of his journey, for hardships increased rapidly. The narrowing mountain valley necessitated repeated crossing of the streams, and other hardships were encountered, one of the most distressing being the many alkaline springs of water unfit for use. Dr. Tompkins continues:

"A peculiarity is now observable in this region which was to me a wonder indeed. I now allude to the prevalence of Toads in this region which are adorned with a tail and a pair of Horns. They are called Horned Toads. They are smaller than the common toads seen in the Eastern States and are of a light grey colour with frequent dark brown spots. They are harmless. 8 miles from A. La Prele River brought us to Fourche Bois River with its steep banks, good grass and beautiful groves. Soon after crossing this river we came in sight of the north fork of the Platte but not near the place of crossing. 5 miles farther on brings us to Deer Creek an excellent camping

place. Fish abundant. 7 miles farther on can be found another good camping place, but the Gulfs, ravines and dismal places through which we passed this day chills me to think of. We at length came to the upper ferry or crossing of the north fork of the Platte River where feed is plenty and where fine groves abound on each side of the river. At this place our party divided into two squads. E. A. Tompkins, A. M. Taylor, W. W. Lampham and N. Spaulding formed one party and John Parker, John Guthrie, A. J. Compton and C. L. Compton formed the other. We still travelled together however.

"The overbearing insolence of A. M. Taylor was the cause of our separation, but on we went. 12 miles of a crooked road brings us to a Mineral Lake and Spring and 10 miles farther yet brought us to an alkaline plain which should be avoided by man and beast. High bluffs may be seen all around it. By going on a short distance we find good water at a place called Willow Springs. After going 15 miles farther we came to a creek on the south side of the route. 8 miles farther brings us in the neighborhood of numerous springs affording plenty of water, but no grass of consequence. Salterus may be obtained here by the wagon-load. All this region of country is undoubtedly the remains of most tremendous volcanic action. All the traces seen of volcanoes in any country may be seen here."

Along the Sweetwater

"4 Miles farther on from the springs brought us to a Sweet Water River a beautiful but swift stream flowing through abundance of grass. In coming to this river we also came to 'Independence Rock' a wonder of itself, being above 500 feet long and 280 feet high and arising abruptly out of the level plain completely disconnected with any other elevation and composed of solid granite.

It is completely covered with names painted on the rock.

"5 Miles west of Independence Rock brought us to a place called the Devil's Gate. This is one of the most singular freaks of Nature that the eye of man ever witnessed. I stated above that the valley was walled in on each side by lofty palisades. They vary from 400 to 700 feet in height. At the Devil's Gate the river suddenly turns from the plain and dashes through the only fissure to be found in this towering granite wall. This strange fissure is at least 400 feet in perpendicular height and through it the whole of the Sweetwater foams and dashes with most appaling fury down, down, far down to the plain on the opposite side of the rocks. On the 30th of June we separated from Parker and the Compton boys through the meanness of A. M. Taylor. Our road has been near the river for 15 miles from Independence Rock. Grass is abundant. Farther on the road becomes very rough, crooked and uneven. We cross many creeks, indeed, in order to avoid bad roads. It became necessary for us to ford the river very often. In the course of our route we found some groves of timber, but not enough to satisfy the weary eye of the traveller or relieve it of the sameness that pervaded everything to be seen.

"Towards evening of this day we had sudden and beautiful view of Windy River Mountains, the highest of the Rocky Range. They are covered with eternal snows and presented a scene at once awful, grand and truly sublime. My whole soul seemed to be thrilled at the view. They seemed to personify the Might and Majesty of the great Jehovah and overwhelm the mind with feelings of awe and wonder. A travel of two days more brought us to SOUTH PASS, which is a beautiful valley 22 miles wide instead of a narrow defile as some imagine. It lays between the Wind River Mountains on the north and a con-

necting chain of the Rocky Mountains on the South. It abounds in excellent pasture and so gentle is the ascent that the weary wanderer is scarcely aware of his elevation. At the summit or dividing ridge (if ridge it can be called) are two springs within a stone's throw of each other. The waters of one of those springs flows westward to the Pacific Ocean and the waters of the other unites with the streams which flow into the Gulf of Mexico."

Chapter VI

CHAPTER VI

The Humboldt Trail

PACIFIC SPRINGS! What a thrill it gave the weary emigrant when he came to realize that at last he had crossed the ridge of the continent and could get a refreshing draught from a spring whose surplus waters would find their way to the great Pacific Ocean! Because of the long distance traveled, made to appear longer by recent hardships, the emigrant was ready to believe that El Dorado was close at hand. As a matter of fact, the worst part of the journey was yet before him.

The topography of the country had forced the emigrant trails to take a common course along the Sweetwater and through South Pass, but the fairly level nature of the Green River Basin, into which they now entered, once again offered optional routes. From South Pass several trails led westward to converge at the headwaters of the Humboldt River. The Oregon Trail pursued an irregular course, turning south to Fort Bridger and then across to Bear River and on to Fort Hall. From Fort Bridger the Mormons had taken a shorter trail across the Wasatch Range to Salt Lake, which others later followed. During 1849 another shorter route, known as Sublette's Cut-Off, eliminated the Fort Bridger detour by crossing

the Green River Basin almost directly west from South Pass to Bear River. Just as Fort Bridger lay off the most direct path for the California emigrants, so also did Fort Hall, and before long this northern loop of the trail was shortened by a new path running from Soda Springs to the head of the Humboldt River, eliminating Fort Hall. This was known as Hudspeth's Cut-Off and saved many miles, although the route was a difficult one. The purpose of this chapter will be to follow the trains along the various routes from South Pass to the Sink of the Humboldt River.

Fort Bridger Route

The Fort Bridger route to Fort Hall, since it followed the water courses, had been popular in the earlier Oregon emigration. It led down Pacific Creek to Little Sandy, then down to Big Sandy, until at a point near its mouth it crossed to Green River. The river was always recorded as "a beautiful stream of crystal clear water." Here emigrants either forded the river or ferried across.

From the west bank of Green River the trail led across the low divide to Black's Fork of Green River and up along this stream to Fort Bridger. This trading post, established by James Bridger in 1843, was built of split posts in the form of a hollow square enclosing the buildings and the corral for stock. Here was to be found a blacksmith shop, an institution much needed by the emigrant trains at this stage of their journey.

From Fort Bridger northwest, the trail crossed Muddy Creek and made its way over the Bear River Divide to Bear River, which it followed to Soda Springs, and thence to Fort Hall.

Sublette's Cut-Off

While earlier emigrants had used the Fort Bridger route, the gold seekers were anxious to shorten its length

as much as possible, and whenever a shorter way became known they were ready to take it, even though it might impose greater hardships. This saving of miles accounted for the popularity of the Sublette Cut-Off.

The journal of Jasper M. Hixson gives an excellent description of this part of the journey. Beginning with the entry for June 19, 1849, when near South Pass, it reads:

"We got on the road at 6 a. m., and in one mile we came to the forks of the road, the left going to Salt Lake via Fort Bridger and the right hand being known as the Sublett's cut-off to Fort Hall. Formerly the Oregonian and California emigrants went by Fort Bridger, but the past two years they had mostly taken the right hand road. So we took that although it was understood there was a forty-five mile desert before we came to Green river. In six miles we reached the Little Sandy, and six miles further we reached the Big Sandy by noon, travelling thirteen miles. Having reduced our loading so that it could be put into two wagons, we concluded to use the other wagon to cook a good meal and keep warm, as it was very cold. After arranging our loading into two wagons and partaking of a sumptuous meal prepared by one who had become quite proficient in camp cooking, we filled our kegs with water, so as to have some for our mules on the morrow. Everything being ready for an early start, we turned in for the night.

"On Wednesday, June 20th, camp was pitched. We left camp next morning at 3 a. m., for our long drive. The road was fair for three miles, then we came to a swamp or alkali flat that was very bad. After that, for twenty-five miles the road was fine, rolling but firm, the kind to make good time. The remainder was quite rough, and we did not reach the river until after dark. We camped two miles above the ferry, where we first came to the river, traveling forty-three miles.

"On Thursday, June 21st, we were at Camp 47. We left camp at 6 a. m. and drove down to the ferry on the Green river. This was as primitive a conveyance to carry human beings across a deep, rapid river of several hundred feet in width as could be imagined. A simple wagon box, with the cracks stopped with rags so as to keep out the bulk of the water, but it keeps one or more constantly bailing out water to keep the frail boat afloat. The estimate was one or more persons drowned daily. The current is so swift and the water so cold, if one gets into the river he has but a slim chance to get out. The wagons had to be taken apart and put into the boat, and the mules had to swim. Some of the boys swam with the animals, to pilot them to the landing. We were fortunate in getting in among the first, and got over and all ready to pursue our journey by noon. After traveling over a high ridge to a small stream that runs into Green river, we came to fine grass, where we camped, after traveling eight miles.

"On Friday, June 22d, we left camp at 6, traveled up the stream about six miles, then struck across the highest mountain we had yet came to, crossing several small streams that flow from the still higher mountains to our right from the snow-banks that melt during the day. The grass all through this section on hills and bottoms was good. After traveling eighteen miles we encamped on a stream running to the southwest, to help swell the Green river, and on to the Pacific ocean via the Colorado.

"On Saturday, June 23d, we struck out at 6. The road was fearfully bad, with mudholes, gullies, steep banks and swampy bottoms. Finally we arrived at Ham's fork of Green river. This was a deep, rapid stream, most too small to be called a river, and too big to be called a creek. It was just barely fordable by propping up our wagon beds, which was done by cutting pieces from the small cottonwoods or willows that grow along the streams

from twelve to eighteen high, owing to the depth of the stream, and placing these posts on the bolster of the wagon by the side of the standard, and the bed of the wagon was placed on the posts, and with ropes lashed so as to prevent the bed from toppling over. In this way we were able to ford streams and save getting our provisions wet. Some of our mules were fine swimmers and we could usually manage to have some of them touching bottom while the others were swimming. In that way we made the crossings.

"After crossing the stream we ascended the mountain that divides the waters of Green river and those of the Great Basin. The waters running westerly from the summit of this mountain reach the Great Salt Lake by the Bear river. High up on the side of this mountain we encountered a swarm of mosquitoes that baffled description. They settled on the mules like a swarm of bees 'on a sour-apple tree,' and the poor animals were frantic; we could scarcely manage them. As soon as we could do so, we unharnessed them, and secured them to the wagon wheels; then built fires of the chaparrel and dead quaking-asp poles we secured near by, but the pests did not appear to mind the smoke. We then stewed out bacon grease, and gathered the most offensive smelling herbs we could find, and put in the grease, and doped the mules from head to heels. This gave them some relief. In the meantime we had to put our handkerchiefs over our faces and wear our gloves to protect ourselves from the mosquitoes. After some relief from the bacon grease and herbs, and a gentle breeze that came in an opportune time, we hitched and drove to the edge of a snow bank on the summit of the mountain, where we hoped the cold would prevent the mosquitoes from troubling us during the night, but we found they arose from the edge of the snow, although not

in such swarms as had attacked us during the afternoon. We only traveled eighteen miles.

"Sunday, June 24, we struck out at sun up; mosquitoes fearfully bad, although the night was cold and our camp was near by a snow bank not less than thirty feet deep. As we had to pass through a quaking-asp grove where there was a great amount of dead saplings, we hoped by making a dense smoke to clean our mules of the mosquitoes. Before the wagons reached the grove Major Lane and I had a smoke so dense the animals could scarcely be seen. But all in vain. The mosquitoes buzzed and sang as if they were only pleased at their power to annoy. So we passed on and soon reached the top of a high ridge, and commenced the descent to the waters of Bear river, by the way of a long, narrow ravine, which was so steep we had to let our wagons down by means of ropes. We tied a long rope to the hind axle of the wagon and then took a turn around the rock and let the wagon descend gradually, as the hill was too steep for the mules to hold it unaided. . . . The boys had gone into camp on the bank of Bear river, just below [above] the mouth of Smith's fork, only traveling seventeen miles. The grass was fine, and it was a great relief to get down from the high altitude we had been in several days.

"On Monday, June 25th, we left camp at 6:30; crossed Smith's Fork, where we had to elevate our wagon-beds about twelve inches. The ford was good, but the bottom beyond was very swampy. The road followed down the Bear river bottom for some distance; then the river passed through a canyon, and the road made a detour to the right and we came to Thomas's fork, another good-sized stream, where we had to elevate our wagon-beds again. Here we nooned. After noon we crossed a high spur of the mountains, then down a narrow canyon and through a most beautiful valley about a mile wide, with a beautiful stream

running through the valley. Then we had to ascend a peak 8,000 feet above ocean level, and then down again into Bear valley, traveling twenty-five miles, encamping opposite Peg Leg Smith's."

Peg Leg Smith's

"On Tuesday, June 26th, we spent part of the forenoon visiting Peg Leg Smith's trading post, which consists of four log cabins and some Indian lodges. The old trapper was a power in these parts until he lost his leg, since which time he has turned his attention to trading. He was fairly well supplied with articles to barter with the Indians for the furs taken in this section. He has a good stock of mountain sheepskins, as well as deerskins, clothing, pants and coats, or hunting shirts, as well as any amount of moccasins. I got a pair of deerskin pants with long fringes down the seams on the legs and a mountain sheepskin hunting-gown. They are preferred to the deerskin, not being so heavy. . . .

"After laying in a good supply of useful clothing, and some delicacies in the way of eatables, we traded one of our mules, which had become somewhat jaded, for a span of four-year-old half-breed, iron grey horses, paying ten dollars to boot.

"These mountain traders do not care much about the kind of animal they get but must have at least $10 to boot. This was the slightest mule we had. We called her the race filly, but it would have been the same had we proposed to trade the best mule we had, we would have had to pay $10 difference.

"We left Peg Leg's at 9:30 o'clock, and traveled down the Bear river bottom on a road good, grass very fine, and crossed several small streams. After traveling some nineteen miles, the road leaves the bottom, turning to the right up a stream where we encamped at a quaking-asp

grove, traveling twenty miles. Everything was delightful for a good camp, fine grass, plenty of wood and delightful water; but oh, the mosquitoes—they were horrible.

"On Wednesday, June 27th, we got an early start. After crossing some points of hills that extend to the Bear river we reach a high bottom or bench above the bottom near the river. After traveling some sixteen miles we reach Soda springs, where we nooned. This is a great natural curiosity. . . . The greatest curiosity is the Steamboat spring. It is on a point near the river and comes out of a hole in the rock some twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, and resembles the puffing of a high-pressure steamboat at a distance. One puff it throws the water say eighteen to twenty inches, next time a little higher and the third time still higher, say three to four feet, then it falls back to the minimum; and thus it goes on."

These springs were known also as Beer Springs, a name used by Frémont. Alonzo Delano says of them: "These Springs are one of the greatest luxuries of the whole route. They are highly charged with carbonic acid gas and are as delicious as they are refreshing. They are equal to any soda water in the world, and though good without any concomitants, with lemon-syrup, or sugar, they are delicious."

The Fort Hall Route

Beyond Soda Springs the road divided, one trail leading northwest to Fort Hall, the other running westward across the lava plains of the Great Basin. Since many of the California and Oregon emigrants continued to use the Fort Hall road, it may be of interest to consider that route as described by those who followed it. Delano's able pen has left for us this record:

"July 14 [1849]. About three miles below the Soda Springs the river makes a short turn to the south, around

a high, perpendicular cliff of black traprock, as it seeks its way to its mysterious reservoir of Salt Lake. Here we took leave of Bear River and its fine valley, through which we found so many comforts which we had long been deprived of. The valley of the river is lost among the mountains to the south, while a lateral valley, without a stream flowing through it, runs northwardly towards Fort Hall. Soon after we passed a new route was explored across the western range, to avoid Fort Hall, and saving ninety miles of travel; but the first twenty-five miles is without water. This became the principal road; but as it was not known at the time of passing, we took the road to Fort Hall. Turning north around the point of a rocky spur at the extremity of the Bear Valley, we slowly continued our journey.

"Nearly two miles on the plain west, we observed the craters of two extinguished volcanoes, and in company with my friend, Doctor Hall, I walked out to the southern-most one. . . . Six miles from the Soda Springs we found another with a natural basin, formed by its gradual deposits of lime, and though its waters were sparkling, it was warmer and not so pleasant as those we had just left. Night brought us to the banks of a little mountain brook which ran across the valley, but we could see no outlet, and it was probably lost in the volcanic chasms of the valley. Distance, eighteen miles.

"July 15. About noon we had reached the end of the valley, and then passed through an ascending defile towards the top of the dividing ridge, between the waters of the Bear and the Columbia Rivers. For a few miles the road was uneven, with several sharp hills, and in some parts of the defile there was quite a growth of cottonwood and shrubby trees, and when we attained the highest point, the descent, though not bad, was precipitous. . . . Night found us encamped in the Pass, near a fine

stream which broke out of the mountain, and was of sufficient capacity to turn a mill. Distance, fourteen miles.

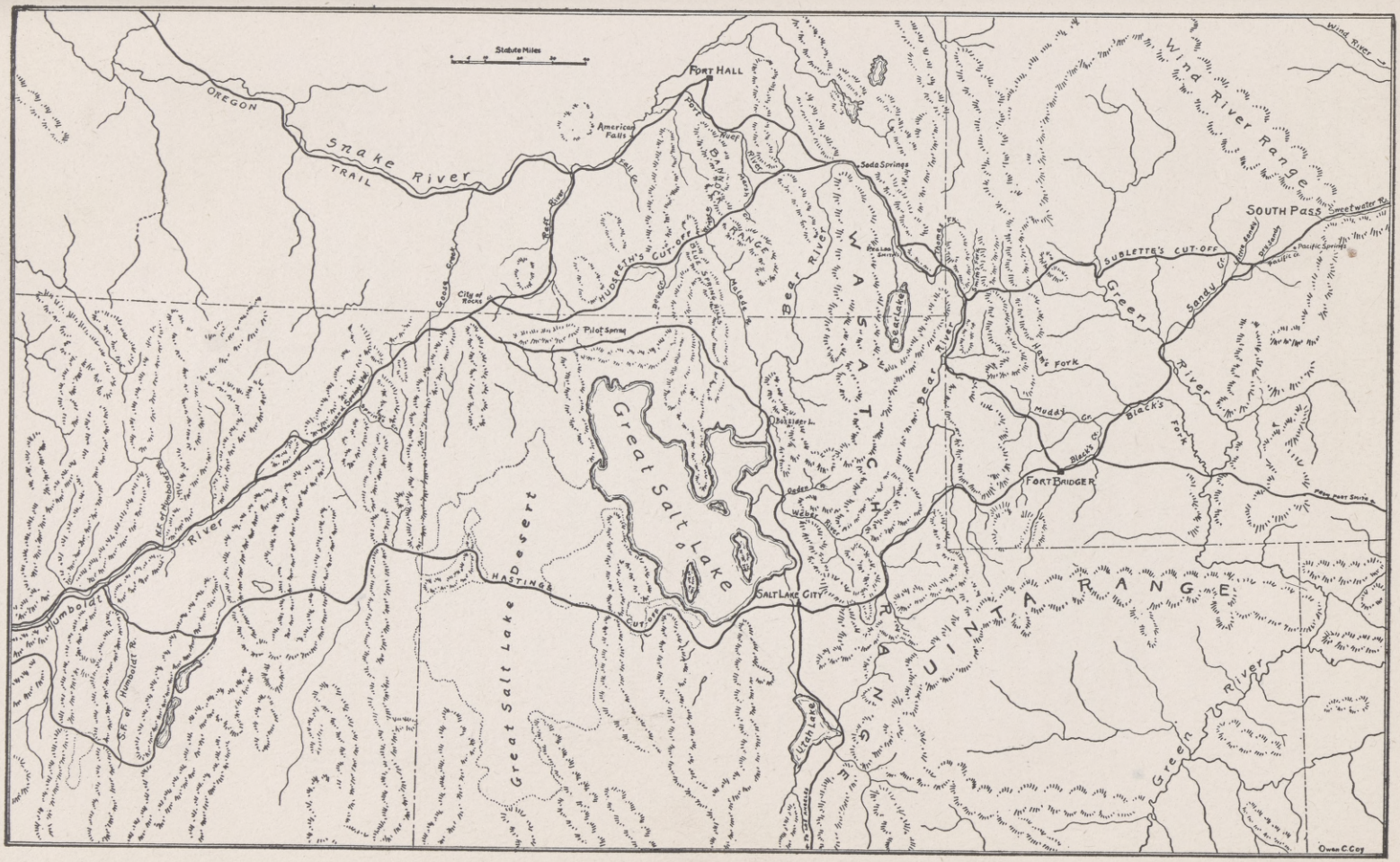
"July 16. It was nearly night when we got through the defile. In passing a grove of young poplars which stood by the road-side, we saw names of many acquaintances written on the white bark, with the different dates of their arrival; among them was that of the Dayton company, dated July 13—three days before us. On emerging from our narrow road upon the barren plain, which was surrounded by high mountains, we encamped on the banks of the Neuf, about a day's drive from Fort Hall. Distance, seventeen miles.

"July 17. We had become excessively weary with our long continued traveling, and the daily routine of duty became tiresome. . . .

"About noon we reached a barren bayou, which led into the Columbia, here called Snake, or American River, where there was excellent grass, and clouds of mosquitoes; and understanding that there was no grass, but plenty of mosquitoes at the fort, we concluded to halt for the day. . . ."

Fort Hall

"July 18. We reached Fort Hall about nine o'clock in the morning. Its form resembled that of Fort Laramie, although it is much smaller. It belongs to the Hudson Bay Company, who, by treaty at the cession of Oregon to the United States by England, was allowed to retain possession nineteen years, in order to close its affairs, five of which have expired. We had hoped to obtain some supplies here, but were disappointed. The company were even purchasing bacon and flour from the emigrants who were overloaded. The fort stands on the left bank of the American Fork of the Columbia, sometimes called Snake, and formerly Lewis and Clark's River, which is here per-


Statute Miles
OREGON
TRAIL
Snake River
FORT HALL
American Falls
Port Ruef
Soda Springs
Wind River Range
Wind River
SOUTH PASS
Sweetwater R.
SUBLETTE'S CUT-OFF
Pacific Springs
Green River
Sandy Cr.
Hams Fork
Muddy Cr.
Black's Fork
Black's Cr.
FORT BRIDGER
Bear River
WASATCH RANGE
Bear Lake
Bear River
Bear River
Great Salt Lake
Great Salt Lake Desert
HASTINGS CUT-OFF
SALT LAKE CITY
Utah Lake
UINTA RANGE
Green River
Humboldt River
N.F. of Humboldt R.
S.F. of Humboldt R.
City of Rocks
Goose Creek
Pilot Spring
HUDSPETH'S CUT-OFF
BLUE SPRING HILLS
Malade R.
Bear Lake Springs
Owen C. Coy

haps five hundred feet broad. On the west, nothing is seen but a vast barren plain, as far as the eye can extend. On the north, at an apparent distance of thirty or forty miles high buttes and mountains rise to the clouds, with nothing in the view to cheer the traveler; and this we felt more keenly after having passed through the fine valley of Bear River. . . .

"Around the fort were several lodges of Snake Indians, and a shirt was their only dress. The honesty of the Indians was so proverbial, that in traveling through their country we had relaxed in our discipline, and did not consider it necessary to keep night guard—a confidence which was not misplaced.

"We were informed that it was eight hundred miles to the settlements in Oregon, and seven hundred to Sutter's Fort in California. About six miles below Fort Hall, we crossed Panack River, a little above its junction with the American. It was here an hundred and fifty feet broad, and so deep that it was necessary to raise our wagon boxes to prevent our provisions from getting wet. Ascending a steep hill after crossing the Panack, we found ourselves upon a barren, sandy plain, where nothing but the interminable sage and greasewood grew. In the sultry sun, and through suffocating clouds of dust, we drove on till night. Our cattle found good grass below a steep hill on the bottoms of the American, after a drive of seventeen miles.

"July 19. Through burning sand, and in dense clouds of dust, we pursued our way, with the scenery of the plain but little varied. We frequently drove along the Banks of the river, and it was always pleasant to view its sluggish current. About twenty miles below Fort Hall, it was nearly one-eighth of a mile wide, with rocky, perpendicular banks of black trap-rock, and rapids were frequent. The American falls were the first of these, and is caused

by a dyke of black trap-rock, extending across the river in a horse-shoe form, making nearly a perpendicular fall. Near this are scattered on the ground, black volcanic *debris*, resembling somewhat anthracite coal, but which is merely melted matter, thrown to the surface. Leaving the falls, the road was broken and hilly, with steep pitches, but we got over safely, without trouble, and reached our place of encampment before sundown. . . . Distance, eighteen miles.

"July 20. . . . We crossed Fall Creek, a fine clear little stream, having a succession of falls, which have been erroneously, I think, called petrified beaver-dams.

"Although there were some steep ravines, the road was better than we expected, and we found it unnecessary to use ropes in letting our wagons down hill. We met a train of five hundred mules, from Oregon, loaded with supplies for the fort. There were both men and women in the train. The half-breed squaws, with sun-burnt faces, soiled buckskin clothes, and wild, half-savage looks, made a strange appearance.

"A long drive brought us to Raft River, or creek, for it is only two rods wide, flowing through a valley three or four miles wide, with good grass near the stream. Here the road forks, one leading to California, the other to Oregon. Distance, eighteen miles.

"July 21. Our course now lay southerly, up the creek, and during the day we crossed it three times. . . . The Valley of Raft Creek was like all others in the country, a level, barren plain, except in the immediate bottoms. On either hand were high hills, rising abruptly from the sides, with black trap-rocks protruding from the surface, destitute of vegetation, except occasionally a few fir and cedar trees, and bunch-grass growing on their summits. It was quite dark before we found a small spring, a mile from the road, and although the road had been good dur-

ing the day, general weariness had prevented a long drive. Distance, sixteen miles.

"July 22. Our traveling now became somewhat monotonous, with but little variation of scenery. . . . Our train soon left the valley of the Raft, at the point where I have since been told the new road from the Soda Springs, found by Myers, comes in. Turning up a small branch between high hills, we traveled all day in a small valley, the road ascending all the way, and night overtook us before we had gained the ascent of the ridge, where we found a spring, about a mile to the right of the road. . . . Distance, fifteen miles."

Hudspeth's Cut-Off

The "new road from Soda Springs" referred to was commonly known as Hudspeth's Cut-Off, a route popular in the later travel of 1849, as it afforded a saving of many miles in a wearisome journey. Judge Alonzo Sawyer, who used this shorter route on his way to California in 1850, gives an excellent description of it in his *Way Sketches*. This cut-off left the Oregon Trail four miles from Steamboat Springs and struck directly west toward a range of mountains across a small basin about eight miles wide. This basin showed plainly the effect of volcanic action, for lava formations were everywhere apparent and the trail itself led across what was designated by the emigrants as "Old Crater." Frémont says this was "a very perfect crater, of an oval or nearly circular form, three hundred and sixty paces in circumference, and sixty feet at the greatest depth. The walls which were perfectly vertical and disposed like masonry in a very regular manner, were composed of a brown-colored scoriaceous lava."

Ascending the mountains west of the basin just described, the trail passed a number of snow-capped peaks before descending to a small creek which was hurrying

to join the Columbia River. Alternately ascending and descending the emigrants finally came to the Port Neuf, a larger branch of the Columbia. The trail next forded Marsh Creek and crossed the Bannock Mountains whose ascent, though long, was not difficult. A short descent and the passage of another high mountain brought the travelers out upon a wide basin lying between the Bannock Range and the Blue Springs Hills to the west. Following down Wright Creek to the southwest they found abundant grass, and then began climbing the Blue Springs Hills which were crossed through deep, narrow ravines, a passage both tedious and dangerous. Then the emigrants came out into Deep Creek Valley, where, because of lack of water in the lower plains, the trail kept along the high lands crossing various ridges. From Deep Creek Valley the passage of another mountain brought them to a branch of Raft River, another tributary of the Columbia. Raft River Valley was well watered and afforded good feed for the live stock. The trail led westward along and across the branches of Raft River, and at the City of Rocks joined the road from Fort Hall.

Fort Bridger to Salt Lake

Before proceeding farther along this route notice should be taken of other trails that offered alternate routes to the Humboldt River. As was noted earlier, two routes led westward from Fort Bridger toward the land of opportunity; the older one crossed the ridge to Bear River and down this stream to Soda Springs; the other, not so popular with the California emigrants, followed a difficult pass through the Wasatch Mountains to Salt Lake and the Mormon Settlements. The latter trail was used by the Mormons in their trek to Salt Lake in 1847.

The company of which Dr. Tompkins was a member

also took the latter trail. In recording his experiences after leaving the fort, the doctor says:

"Still 13 miles farther on over towering hills and rough roads brought us to Muddy Fork where we remained all day of Sunday the 7th of July. 12 Miles on may be found the foot of a vast dividing ridge through which there is a defile of 6 miles in length. At the termination of which we find numerous sulphur springs. It is said that the elevation of this point is much the greatest of any we have passed over on our route, even higher than the South Pass. This is caused by our wandering around the many mountains on our route and rather tending up than down. This point is 8,230 feet above the Sea and forms the connecting link between the Wind River chain and the Bear River or Utah Mountains bordering the Great Salt Lake. Our road is exceedingly crooked and uneven. Grass and Stone Coal abounds at Sulphur Springs. Naptha and Tar abound in exaustless quantities within one mile of Sulphur Springs. 3 Miles brought us to Bear River which is said to be 200 feet wide at this place. Its banks are adorned with beautiful groves of cotton-wood trees beside large quantities of willow and Hawthorne trees. The Valley of this river will average 3 miles in width and is as beautiful as any that can be found perhaps on the globe. The Mountains that border this valley are said to be 6,400 feet above the Sea."

The route here described is practically the same as the present route of the Union Pacific Railroad, cutting through the mountains from Green River Valley to Salt Lake City.

The Great Basin

"The valley of the Great Salt Lake," continues Dr. Tompkins, "appears from the summits of the Utah [Wasatch] Mountains as one of the most enchaunting

scenes that ever enraptured the Soul of man. The eye wanders over a boundless space (seemingly) of rich and beautiful territory adorned with a most luxuriant carpet of grass which is bespangled with brilliant flowers of every hue under Heaven. Lofty Mountains dot the plain here and there and Rivers that appear in the distance like so many streams of silver glide through the region in all directions and terminate in Lakes that might well be mistaken inexaustable fountains of liquid silver. Each and all gives the scene a look of beauty and grandeur that could not fail to thrill the soul of the most icy hearted person alive. This Great Valley is bounded on the north by a chain of mountains running nearly parallel with Humboldt River. On the east by the Utah Mountains on the South by a succession of broken chains of the Cordilleras and on the west by the Sierra Nevada. In going down into this Valley it will be perceived that we descend from 3,530 to 4,030 feet. The Valley of the Great Salt Lake varies from 4,700 to 4,200 feet above the level of the sea. Many very high mountains rise abruptly out of this valley and even out of the midst of the Great Salt Lake. This Valley is nearly 700 miles from east to west and 800 from north to south. The soil is mostly sand and black mould. It is exceedingly porous for which reason the Rivers all terminate in a sink or small Lake; indeed they will or must necessarily do so from the fact that they are perfectly dammed up by the mountains."

Since crossing into the Bear River Valley, travelers on all the trails had been traversing the Great Basin, but they were not conscious of the significance of that term until they approached the valley of Great Salt Lake, or, if they had followed one of the more northerly trails, until they had crossed the divide between Bear River and the tributaries of Snake River and entered the more arid region. The term "Great American Desert" had been

applied to the Great Plains three decades before, but no part of the territory east of the Rockies so well deserved that name as did the area between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada.

Geologists explain that at one time there was a low arch of the earth's crust reaching from the Sierra Nevada to the Wasatch Range east of the Great Salt Lake, but that subsequently it became broken, and subsided, leaving a low area between these two lofty mountain ranges. The fractured edges of the two ranges may still be seen facing each other, giving evidence of this great geologic change. In the disruption of the surface large broken fragments were disjoined and tilted, forming the numerous nearly parallel mountain ranges of the present State of Nevada. The arid nature of the region finds its cause in the Sierra which rises high above the desert and cuts off the moisture-laden winds from the Pacific, thus depriving it of rainfall. The result is that its rivers, instead of cutting their way through to the sea, are content to run a few miles and lose themselves through evaporation in alkali marshes or salt lakes. The present lack of rainfall, however, has not existed always, for there is abundant evidence of former great lakes or seas in that region which is now desert waste. Geologists have located these with precision and have given names to two of them. "Lake Bonneville," of which Great Salt Lake is now but a small remainder, once covered an extensive area and probably had an outlet to the sea through the Snake and Columbia Rivers. "Lake Lahontan" filled the depression near the Sierra Nevada, and remnants of it are now seen in the Sink of the Humboldt, in Carson, Walker and Pyramid lakes, as well as in the numerous salt marshes and alkali plains. It is therefore not surprising that the emigrants found an abundance of salt and alkali upon the plains and around the lakes where these great bodies of water once stood.

The deserts caused the emigrants perhaps the greatest distress of the whole journey, because the excessive salt and alkali dust filled the air and polluted the meager water supply.

Westward from Salt Lake

The Mormon emigrants of 1847 found upon the fertile plains at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains an oasis in an otherwise practically uninhabitable desert. Here sprang up as if by magic the Mormon commonwealth, with Salt Lake City as its metropolis, which offered a welcome respite for those who chose the route by Salt Lake. From Salt Lake City the emigrant could select one of three possible westward leading routes. One of these turned to the southwest and will be taken up in a later chapter. The other two led westerly, converging upon the headwaters of the Humboldt River. The one most commonly used in 1849 passed north of the lake. Dr. Tompkins has left a record of his trip along this route. After a sojourn of about two weeks at Salt Lake City, where because of illness he had been left by his party, he pushed on with two ponies and "about one week's provisions." His journal continues:

"I went the northern route as it is called around the Great Salt Lake. On this route 2 miles from the City we came to Warm Springs which issue from the base of a high hill and flow toward Salt Lake the heat was 72°. 2 Miles farther on brings us to Hot Springs in which eggs would cook in 4 minutes. 17 Miles farther brings us to 'blooming grove.' 4 Miles farther north runs a beautiful creek on which we camped July 29th. On the 20th we passed numerous pyramidial mountains and crossed many fine creeks one of which was Weber Fork, another Box-elder Creek, etc. We also passed a hot spring. . . .

"We passed Brownsville on the evening of the 30th.

Passed two springs not one rod apart, one of which was cold and the other hot and sulphury.

"We arrived at Bear River on the 1st of August. Here I was obliged to stay 3 days on account of sickness. The Indians were very kind to me and did me good service. I ate a dinner of frogs as soon as I could eat any. August 4th crossed Bear River, travelled 3 miles to Mud Creek. 6 Miles to Warm Springs, 14 miles to Warm and Cold Spa. 12 Miles farther to Sink Creek, thence 6 Miles to Deep Creek Crossing and 6 Miles farther to Deep Creek Sink where we camped August 5th.

"The Country is uneven and very dusty. The Road is very crooked and stony in places. In one part of the territory over which we past the plain is all covered with mounds that resembled graves from the effect of sands lodging against some stone which thus appeared like the tombstone of a Church yard.

"On the 6th we went to Pilot Springs 10 miles. 7 Miles farther on we found good spring water to our left. 3 Miles farther on brought us to Oregon Creek and 9 Miles farther still to Caplus Creek or Cassus Creek according to the Mormons. 7½ Miles brings us to the Junction of the Fort Hall Road in coming to which we pass the celebrated Steeple Rocks which are from 40 to 120 feet in height and appear like huge shafts."

Hastings' Cut-Off

The southern route from Salt Lake to the Humboldt Trail proceeded in nearly a direct westerly line south of the lake. It shortened the distance, and was known as Hastings' Cut-Off, from the name of its early proponent. This route had been used by Frémont in 1846 and because of its recommendation by Hastings and others had been followed by many emigrants since that time, the Reed-Donner party being among this number.

Although it had already acquired an evil reputation because of its desert nature, there were many in the vast throng of emigrants gathered at Salt Lake who were willing to take grave risks if thereby they could shorten the journey and hasten their arrival at the gold mines. Among these was John Wood, of Ohio, whose diary affords a graphic picture of this journey. It reads in part as follows:

"July 29th [1850]. Today we have been making necessary preparations to leave the Mormon city tomorrow. However, this morning we held a meeting, to conclude which road we would take from this place, there being two, one which goes north of the lake, through Fort Hall, and one leading south of the lake, called the Cut-Off, or Hastings' route, intersecting the other road at the head of the Humboldt or St. Mary's river, about 400 miles from here. After a short deliberation, we concluded to take the latter road. . . .

"July 30th. This morning I feel down-in-the-mouth, for I feel just as if I were leaving home; in fact much more, for already I have been disappointed badly in the roads and in the sorrows and trials of the trip, and knowing that the worst of the journey is yet to be completed, I almost wish I never had been born. But we hitched up and started on, casting a wishful look behind, where all seems to be happiness, peace and plenty, but ahead all is discouragement, toil, hunger and death. Oh, who can live and not despair under such circumstances, but here is a little band that is bound to go through if God alone is willing. Our cattle seem to be considerably revived. We traveled 16 miles, over a very dusty road to a good spring—encamped and found good grass.

"July 31st. Started early this morning and traveled until 9 o'clock, when we reached the Great Salt Lake, which is certainly a great curiosity. Here the Mormons make their salt; three buckets full of water make one of pure

salt, the finest in the world. Here a number of us took a long bath; the water being so heavy with salt that a person cannot sink from the surface, and clear as crystal. We traveled 22 miles and encamped at a good spring and good grass, but had awful dusty roads. The water generally along here is brackish.

"August 1st. This morning we met some Mormon men who had been conducting some emigrants out 10 or 12 days travel on this road, and they told us that we were within 28 miles of an 80 mile desert, and that we would have to cut grass here to feed our cattle, while crossing, so we took our scythes and mowed each team a large pile of grass and loaded it into the wagons and got ready to start by 2 o'clock this evening. We now have to travel 28 miles from here before we reach water, so after cooking enough here to do us this evening and in the morning, and filled our kegs with water, we started on and traveled late; our cattle must suffer all night, for water, and travel hard all day tomorrow, through the dust until night, before we reach it—this is too hard.

"August 2nd. Bright and early this morning we were on the road and traveled on through dust and heat for 18 miles, when we reached two good springs, away upon the side of a mountain, two miles from the road, and going these two last miles, up hill, you ought to have seen the bullocks heave when they smelt the water; some of them, however, gave up and would not pull a pound, for they couldn't. At these springs is a great camping place, and about 50 wagons are now camped here. There is some little dry bunch grass here and we intend to stay here until tomorrow evening and rest our cattle. We are now 17 miles from the starting point across the desert, and having good water and plenty of wood, all are engaged in cooking for the desert.

"August 3rd. This forenoon all were engaged in cook-

ing yet. I cooked 11 large flat cakes this morning, in a skillet which I borrowed from a couple of ladies who had got through cooking. . . . We stayed at the springs until 2 o'clock, then started and drove six miles to another good spring and camped for the night.

"August 4th. This morning we filled all the kegs we had, for this is the last fresh water spring for perhaps over a hundred miles, and started on and went 11 miles to the last spring on this side of the desert, and camped for the day. Here we found only tolerably good grass and the water uncommon brackish and scarce, so we cannot get enough for our stock."

The Salt Lake Desert

"August 5th. This morning there are hundreds here preparing to make a start about 12 o'clock into the dreaded desert. Hundreds are gathered around this spring, which is very brackish, and contains a portion of sulphur, quarreling about who shall fill their cask first or get water for their famishing cattle or horses. Many are fearful they will never get any of their stock across. No one knows the exact distance across the desert, but the most that are here now are filling everything that will hold water. It is from this spring about 90 miles to the City of the Desert, which we left six days ago.

"About one o'clock today we started into the field of desolation; for the first 14 miles we had to travel over a very high and rough mountain, the road over which being so rough and sliding that we had to hold our wagons from upsetting, with ropes. We reached the foot of the mountain, on the other side about sunset, where we rested a short time and took some refreshment; then we started on our nocturnal journey. The road is exceedingly dusty, and appears to be perfectly level.

"Nothing grows along here but wild sage, which grows

in dry sand, and after traveling until midnight the country appears to assume a different appearance somewhat, being an extensive plain, destitute of everything, even of wild sage, and yet we crossed a steep hill in the night, when we had to put our shoulders to the wheel in earnest, lifting the wheels over rocks three and four feet high almost perpendicular.

"We passed a wagon which had a sick man in it, who was about to perish for water, so Captain Robinson put him in his wagon and we traveled until daylight, when we found that some of our cattle were nearly gone, and some of us not much better.

"August 6th. This morning we stopped and rested about an hour, taking a little breakfast, giving our cattle about a quart of water apiece and some hay. It has the appearance of being cloudy today and of rain; if it does it will almost be an interposition of divine providence, in our favor.

"The road has now become good, being very level, smooth and solid, and now while I am sitting here by the wagon wheel I discover that one of our steers is so near gone that he will not eat any hay; poor fellow, we will have to make a mile stone of you shortly, and probably of all the rest.

"We suppose that we are about 35 miles from water; and can it be possible, that the cattle can ever take these wagons through. The desert is a barren waste, generally level, and mostly covered with a thin saline crust; some places the ground being very soft. We had not gone far until the steer spoken of above gave way, but on we went pushing for life and death, not knowing how far we have to go, but rather expect to reach the water by dark; we traveled on hard until night and reached a high bluff of rocks, where we were told we could find plenty of water, but lo and behold, it was 25 miles farther on.

"Ah, who can imagine our feelings; disappointment sinks the heart of man. Here, around these rocks, our hopes had lingered the livelong day but now they are transplanted 25 miles ahead, around a beautiful group of springs. . . .

"At the bluffs we fed the last of our hay and gave the cattle the last drop of water, and started on; now we begin to pass a great many dead and dying cattle, and see men suffering extremely for water, but here some men have hauled out water to relieve the emigrants, which they sell at $1 a gallon.

"Several of our cattle about dark are giving way and cannot go much farther; they look awful bad, and I know they feel worse than they look. I judge them by myself. Soon after dark another steer in our team gave way, and he was left, and some others in the company have also gone the way of all flesh, but we are going to see how many can go through; roll on is the cry now with everyone; we are going through or die. We have not an ox in the company now but what will take hard cracking with the whip and never flinch, but they certainly can endure more fatigue than I ever expected.

"About 10 o'clock two more steers gave out, which left us but two yoke to take our wagons through; some other teams gave way entirely and stopped for the night. When we got within 10 miles of the water our cattle seemed to know, by some instinct, that water was not far ahead, and became animated with new life, and the two small yoke we had attached to our big wagon, walked as fast as I could, and sometimes would trot, and when we got within a mile of the water, I had to walk before them to keep them from running. Who could not sympathize with flesh and blood, suffering in this way?

"It was one o'clock at night when we got through. This was the severest trial I have had by far, the desert

proving to be 93 miles instead of 75, as we had understood, and having to walk all the way almost without stopping, with but little to eat and drink, and no sleep, was soul-trying, in the extreme. We dropped our bodies under the wagons and in less than five minutes were in a state of unconsciousness.

"Thus far the Lord hath brought us on.

"August 7th. This morning we found ourselves near a burning mountain, surrounded by a number of good springs and good grass. This morning our case is deplorable, notwithstanding it is heart-cheering to see water and grass; our team is broken and we must leave McLean's last wagon; the only resort we have now is to make pack saddles and pack our provisions on our remaining cattle, as many others have had to do.

"Emigrants are arriving here all the time from the desert, almost famished for water; they say men, women and children are dying with thirst and fatigue. All start in ignorance of the distance across, and many take but little water and they must perish. Mr. Hall, who left his wife on the desert yesterday, is preparing to go back after his wife and wagon.

"Our company rigged out a team loaded with water and have gone back on the desert to relieve the suffering, without money and without price. They found many at the point of death, and saved them, many suffering extremely. Mr. Ogle, who carried water back in the desert, on his back, 20 or 30 miles, tells of one man that could not speak, whom he relieved, and many others almost in similar condition.

"News of the most distressing character is coming from the desert all the time; many, on arriving here, are perfectly disheartened; some cursing and swearing and others praying. This evening we got our few cattle and drove down the road about a mile to a good spring, and com-

menced cutting up our wagon and making pack saddles of it; we made the pads of the wagon cover and stuffed them with dry grass."

Their wagons having been abandoned, some of their meager supplies were placed upon a light cart constructed from the wheels of a carriage they had found along the trail side, and other luggage was packed upon the backs of the oxen for the continuation of the journey. From Wood's description of the topography it would seem that his party was then not far from the eastern boundary of Nevada, a short distance south of the present route of the Central Pacific Railroad.

The Salt Lake Desert had been passed in safety but the country beyond did not offer many charms to weary travelers. In fact, Wood described it as "one of the most uninhabitable parts of God's creation." Here and there springs were found and around them grass could be had for the hungry cattle, although no place offered opportunity for the emigrants to replenish the larder for themselves. After ten days more of travel through this desolate country, the trail at last joined the Fort Hall road at the point where the South Fork of the Humboldt joins the main stream. At last they had reached the main emigrant trail again, but in a condition far from satisfactory, for in Wood's own words they found their "digestive organs perfectly dormant for the want of something to do." Notice will later be taken of their further experiences on the Humboldt trail.

The emigrants who followed Hastings' Cut-Off came onto the main trail about one hundred and fifty miles west of the "City of Rocks" near the present corner of Utah, Nevada, and Idaho, where the various other trails converged. Here a peculiar geological formation had left great boulders standing in fantastic shapes very like the buildings of a city.

1849
JOHN
DARE
Franz Geritz

Down the Humboldt

From the City of Rocks, which lay near the divide between the Snake River Valley and the Great Basin, the emigrant turned southwest into the arid region of the Great Basin. In the northeastern portion of present Nevada the trail traversed Goose Creek Valley and Thousand Springs Valley across barren wastes to the upper waters of the Humboldt River.

Along this portion of the trail the emigrants began to feel most severely the effect of the long journey. This was especially noticeable among the wearied animals, many of which gave out, entirely exhausted. Dr. Tompkins records that in 1850 when he passed through Goose Creek Valley, "the dead animals were so thick we could not get out of the stench of decaying bodies. The River was damed up very often by them and yet we were doomed to drink of that water or perish with thirst."

This lack of good water was experienced by man and beast alike, as may be judged from this extract from the diary of Jasper Hixson:

"During the day we crossed a deep ravine, where we found a spring of pure water, the first we had had for nearly a week, that from the river being badly affected with alkali, mud and other impurities, and it was here the mule we called the 'She-Devil' took her first drink in all this dusty, hot week's travel. She would never drink out of a bucket, and the bank of the river here was too steep and the bottom too miry for the animals to get to water."

This wearisome travel down the Humboldt was hard upon all, even those who were best prepared for it through a sufficiency of draft animals and supplies of food. Here it was that the California Association became disrupted and dissolution seemed imminent, when the captain

threatened to resign. The records kept by Ashley were few but illuminating through their very brevity:

"Tues. July 17 [1849]. Very warm—sand roads. Toilsome as hell.

"Wednes. J. 18. Sand!!! Hot!!! Grass parched & dry—P.M. 8ms [miles] of R [iver]. Camp 8.P.M.

"Thurs. July 19—Camped 10 P.M. No grass (wheugh!)

"Fri. July 20 10 o'c. Hot!!! No halt at noon—camped 6 o'c PM. Grass 3 ms.

"Sat. July 21. Staid at slough.

"Sun. July 22. From slew to sink (O. Barrenness)."

Destitute Emigrants

Of those emigrants who reached the Humboldt River travel-worn and destitute of supplies many were led by accumulating hardships to give up in despair. Delano records that during one day three persons committed suicide rather than face further suffering. It will be remembered that when John Wood, after crossing the Salt Lake Desert, had finally reached the Fort Hall road, his party was practically without food of any kind. From his diary we may read the account in his own words:

"August 20th. This morning we bought some bran and some shorts from a man who was hauling it along to feed his horse, but we appropriated it to another use, we made it into batter and cooked some cakes of it, which we relished as being good.

"I also bought 12 pounds of rye, which I ground in a coffee-mill, and reserved for future use, when we had no bran. We paid 20 cents per pound for bran and 25 for rye, and had hard coaxing, after the fashion of starving men, to get it at that.

"We now felt safe for at least a day or two, from starvation, but we hear that the cholera is raging behind; hundreds are dying with it, but here there is not much sick-

ness, yet every day we pass several graves. We started on our tiresome march, with downcast eyes, for we have to travel 32 miles before we reach another camping place, on this river.

"The road was awful dusty and in some places hilly and stony. The dust and gravel would settle in my shoes so much that I would have to stop every few minutes and clean them out, and now my toe nails are worn off almost entirely, so that I go hobbling along, limping twice at once.

"We traveled hard all day and in the night until midnight, when we reached the river, which I sometimes thought we never would, and now, for the first time in my life, I can't tell whether I am more tired than hungry, and am equally unable to describe my feelings. Some of our cattle came very nigh lying down to die, before we reached this, and here there is not a spear of grass—nothing but willows; they must eat them or die. . . .

"August 21st. This morning several of us started out amongst many wagons to buy some flour and bacon, but none could we get, at any price, all being very scarce themselves; so after breakfast we started on our way, inquiring of every man we passed, who had a team, if he could let us have some provisions, at any price, but we could get none. . . .

"August 23rd. . . . This morning we eat the last of our old beef, which had some few maggots in it, but I must acknowledge that it tasted well. . . .

"Oh, my childhood days, where are they? Days of innocence, peace and pleasure, they are gone forever.

"August 24th. Started again this morning, and I have gone ahead, in order to overtake as many wagons as possible and buy provisions. It is now noon and I have set down to rest my weary legs and I feel very much like lying down, but this is the only chance I will have to take

down these notes, and a tiresome task it has been to me.

"I suppose that I have asked to buy of more than 100 men this afternoon, but with no success. I find it very hard to arouse the sympathies of the people; money, a man's best earthly friend, is no inducement for men to part with bread, on this trip. I have offered men two dollars a pound for flour and bacon, but no, they wouldn't take $10, they would see a man die first, and then they wouldn't. . . .

"August 26th. Made an early start this morning and traveled all day, over a tolerably good road, passing sometimes through bottoms which are said to be full of Indians, in places.

"Our cattle are now getting so poor that it takes two to make a shadow. I think they will never weather the storm; their feet are sore, and their backs are sore, too, and we are sore all over, at least I am and expect to be for a long time; yet my feet are sore and every nerve seems to be sprained so that I fear that I will be an old man from this time on. We camped on the bank with but little grass. Beef and coffee for supper.

"August 27th. This morning found us on our way down the Humboldt, the king of rivers for desolation and destitution. The country today presents about the same appearance—a perfect desert, with no timber, nothing but willows. The road today was sandy, which made it tiresome walking.

"This day was exceedingly warm and sultry and now we have no cool water, but have to quench our raging thirst from one of the most sickly streams on the earth. We continue to pass a great deal of valuable property left to rot on these soul-destroying plains. We have had no rain for several weeks now, nor do we expect any.

"Today I saw another man begging for bread, but could get none; he had no money; however, he could get none

anyway, for one-half the emigrants are literally starving, as we are; have nothing but their cattle and probably some tea or coffee; some cannot live on it, and lie down and die, apparently with pleasure; in fact, some have told me they wished they were dead and out of trouble; while others, under the same circumstances, would laugh at the calamity, which shows the difference in men."

The Humboldt Trail and the hardships of the desert near its western end tried the souls of all who traveled the northern routes. In writing of the overland journey Zoeth Skinner Eldredge speaks of the Humboldt Trail as follows:

"That route was a veritable *via Dolorosa* from the point where the trails from Fort Hall and Salt Lake united, to and beyond the base of the Sierra Nevada. From June until October it was crowded with men, women, and children, struggling as they could through one vast cloud of blinding, smothering dust while their jaded teams were dragging their almost empty wagons over hills of crumbling shale, or loose sand and gravel; through deep trenches worn by other wheels, in beds of alkaline earth or volcanic ash, or across broad stretches of desert in which there was no water, and not even a mouthful of bitter wormwood for horses or oxen. It was here that the heat of summer was greatest by day, and the cold severest by night; often when the temperature would be almost unbearable at midday, ice would form in their water pails while they were asleep. It was here that the Indians were most troublesome, watching them from behind the hills or other places of concealment during the day, haunting their camps by night, wounding their cattle with their arrows when they could not stampede them, and butchering any unarmed straggler who strayed beyond the protection of his fellows."

Chapter VII

CHAPTER VII

Across the Desert and Through the Sierra

FROM THE valley of the Humboldt River several routes were available to the emigrant of the gold period. Many of these had been discovered and used by the fur traders and the emigrant trains during the earlier 'forties; others had been more recently discovered or were opened by the gold seekers themselves.

The most northerly trail and therefore the first to be encountered by the westward moving trains was known as "Lassen's Cut-Off." This was in reality a variation of the trail to Oregon which had been opened by Jesse Applegate in 1846. Coming down the Humboldt to the point where the river turned nearly south, at Lassen's Meadows, the trail struck northwesterly across the deserts and lava plains of northwestern Nevada and northeastern California until it came to Goose Lake. The Oregon Trail pushed on west and north, crossing the northern California line near Klamath Lake. Lassen's Trail, however, turned south at Goose Lake, following Pit River for some miles, then taking a course along the lava beds east of Lassen Peak to Big Meadows at the head of Feather River, across the meadows and down to Lassen's trading post on the Sacramento River at the mouth of Deer Creek. As will later be seen in the account of one of those who took

"Lassen's Cut-Off" it was neither shorter nor easier than the others. Its chief advantage was to Peter Lassen, whose trading post was the first settlement to be reached in California.

One of the main-traveled routes followed along the Truckee River to the foot of the Sierra Nevada. Through the Sierra along this trail the choice of three passes was open to the emigrants. The most popular of these was Donner Pass, leading to Emigrant Gap and the Deer Creek mines of Nevada County or to the American River mines of Placer and Eldorado counties. Just north of Donner's was Henness Pass, which offered a shorter route to the rich diggings of the upper Yuba River at Downieville and other points between that place and Marysville. Still farther north was Beckwith Pass, the favorite route for those seeking the upper Feather River mines in what was later to become Plumas County. All these passes were used in 1849 or the early 'fifties. Another road, known as Noble's Road, opened in 1852, led from the Humboldt River near Lassen's Meadows to the Sacramento Valley at Fort Reading. This road crossed the Nevada deserts and the lava fields of modern Lassen County and reached the Sacramento River north of Battle Creek. Since this route was a later development it did not appear in the accounts of the emigrants of 1849.

From the number of mountain passes just listed it might appear that the Truckee River route would appeal strongly to the gold seeker; however, large numbers of them pushed on farther south and crossed the Sierra Nevada south of Lake Tahoe by means of passes cut by the Carson and Walker rivers. Many of the emigrants had brought with them Frémont's report of his western explorations, and the fact that his first crossing of the Sierra Nevada had been made by the way of Carson River Cañon may have prompted their choice of this route.

The lowest area of the Great Basin, which determines the location of the sink of the Humboldt, also includes Carson sink and Walker Lake. Were there sufficient rainfall these would all be united in one lake but instead the rivers drain off into separate lakes and salt marshes, losing themselves in the desert. The stretch of desert from the sink of the Humboldt to the sink of the Carson, and a similar area between the Carson and Walker rivers, gave the overland travelers many uncomfortable hours. However, when either of these rivers was reached a plentiful supply of excellent water from the lofty Sierra Nevada banished the danger from thirst except during occasional marches along unwatered highlands.

Another main-traveled trail led up West Carson River by a very difficult pass to Hope Valley where the main ridge of the Sierra Nevada remained to be crossed. Once over this, the descent to the valley on the west, although not without its difficulties, was easy in comparison with the dreadful desert trip. Just west of Tragedy Springs, so named because of the murder of some emigrants by Indians in 1847, the road forked, the right hand road leading to the American River district as represented by Placerville, the left leading to the Southern Mines at Volcano, Jackson, and Mokelumne Hill. This choice of mining districts may have determined the use of the Carson River route. South of this route lay still another which came up Walker River and crossed the divide at Sonora Pass. This road was poor and the pass difficult to negotiate and therefore not so popular as those farther north.

To the south the Sierra Nevada reared a lofty summit so near to the skies that the passes were inaccessible to the emigrants of the gold period. In fact, at that time no Sierra passes were used between Sonora Pass and the one discovered and used by Joseph Walker in 1833, known as Walker Pass. This was at the headwaters of the Kern

River and is therefore to be considered in reference to the southern emigrant trails rather than those discussed in this chapter.

The Lassen Trail

The emigrant of 1849 and later years was informed regarding most of the routes and his trip was fairly well planned before he reached the Humboldt River. He was ready, however, to accept new light and to modify his plans as the exigencies of the trail demanded.

As the emigrant wagons made the tedious journey down the Humboldt River in the early days of August, 1849, reports kept coming back from the trains ahead that the journey across the desert was very difficult, that there was no grass, and water but once in forty-five miles of hard travel. With these accounts also came reports of a new route which had recently been discovered which not only reduced the distance but avoided the awful experiences of the desert. As these reports persisted the members of the various companies came to think more and more of attempting the new road.

"Learning that the northern road turned off about three miles below," says Alonzo Delano in his entry for August 15, 1849, "we moved down, and turned our cattle out, held a consultation with regard to our course. A man on horseback reported that he had rode thirty miles out on the route; that in ten miles there was grass, in twelve grass and water, and in twenty, grass and water in abundance; and on reaching Rabbit Springs, a distance of thirty-five miles, all difficulty would be ended. Others said that for thirty-five miles there was neither grass nor water; that the road did not go to California at all, but to Oregon, and that the Indians were troublesome and bad. Some said that only half a dozen trains had gone that way; that they were led by McGee, a man who had

lived in California, and was well acquainted with the country, and who expected to find a route over the mountains. . . . It was decided, finally, that we would go the northern route, although some of our company had misgivings. The younger portion being fond of adventure, were loud in favor of the road.

"As we had been assured that there was grass and water on the way, we did not think it necessary to provide against these contingencies, and further than filling a small vinegar keg with water, for the purpose of getting over the first thirty miles, which, as it appeared a little doubtful in the way of essentials, we concluded to drive at night. . . . Our course was in a north-west direction, across the plain, towards a gorge, through which the road ran. The soil had the appearance of fine dry ashes, or clay, without its tenacity—rendering the walking hard. At the distance of ten miles we entered the gorge, but instead of grass there was only the wild sage on a discolored soil. As we slowly wound up the gorge, scarcely able to crawl from fatigue, we felt the dubiousness of our experiment. . . . It was eleven o'clock before Mr. Fredenburgh and I reached the springs, which were a mile off the road; and suffering from thirst we took our cups and quaffed the first draught of pure, cold water which we had drunk for many days. We found a mule train camped around it, and, spreading our blankets, we soon forgot our weariness in sleep.

"August 16. Daylight showed us nothing but rugged, barren mountains, and instead of the grass we had been assured of, there was not a blade to be seen. All that there had been grew on a little moist place, irrigated by three small springs, and this trifle had all been consumed by advance trains. The water from the springs sank into the ground within five rods of their source, and entirely disappeared. It was now twenty miles or more to Rabbit

Springs, the next water. Our wagons had passed during the night, and were far in advance, so that we had the prospect of a late breakfast before us. Taking a parting drink from the pure fountain, we pursued our way in a northwest direction up the gorge to the ridge, and then following down another ravine. At the distance of five miles from the spring we were upon the north-eastern rim of another barren sand-basin, in view of a broken country far beyond. About the centre of this basin, we overtook a wagon, standing by the road-side, when we begged for a drop of water; but, alas! they had none for themselves, and we were obliged to go on without. . . .

"Turning westerly, we pressed on through a small basin beyond the defile, when, after ascending a little elevation, the glad shout was raised, 'I see where the spring is!' Several wagons had stopped in the road, and a knot of men were gathered around a particular spot, which marked the place of the glorious element, and with parched tongues we went up. Judge of our disappointment, when we found the promised springs to be only three or four wells sunk in the ground, into which the water percolated in a volume about the size of a straw, and each hole occupied by a man dipping it up with a pint cup, as it slowly filled a little cavity in the ground. Each man was taking his turn to drink, and we had ample time to get cool before our turn came to taste the muddy water; and as to getting a supply for our cattle, it was out of the question. Beyond us, far as we could see, was a barren waste, without a blade of grass or a drop of water for thirty miles at least. Instead of avoiding the desert, instead of the promised water, grass, and a better road, we were in fact upon a more dreary and wider waste, without either grass or water, and with a harder road before us. We had been inveigled there by false reports and misrepresentation, without preparing for such a contingency,

as we might have done, in some measure, by cutting grass on the river. Our train came up, followed by others. What was to be done? It was thirty-five miles to the river and about the same distance to the spring ahead. Should we go back? Our cattle had already gone without food or water nearly thirty hours. Could they stand it to go back? Could they possibly go forward?"

Black Rock Desert

"While we were deliberating, four wagons came in from the west on their return. They had driven ten miles on the plain, and seeing no probability of reaching water, they commenced a retrograde movement for the river. A few of our older men hesitated, and were of the opinion that prudence dictated that we should return to the river, where we were sure of the means of going forward, rather than launch out into the uncertainties before us. But the majority, without knowing anything of the geography of the country, decided that they might as well go forward as back—trusting to luck more than to judgment—a measure which reduced us to weeks of continued toil and increased hardships. . . .

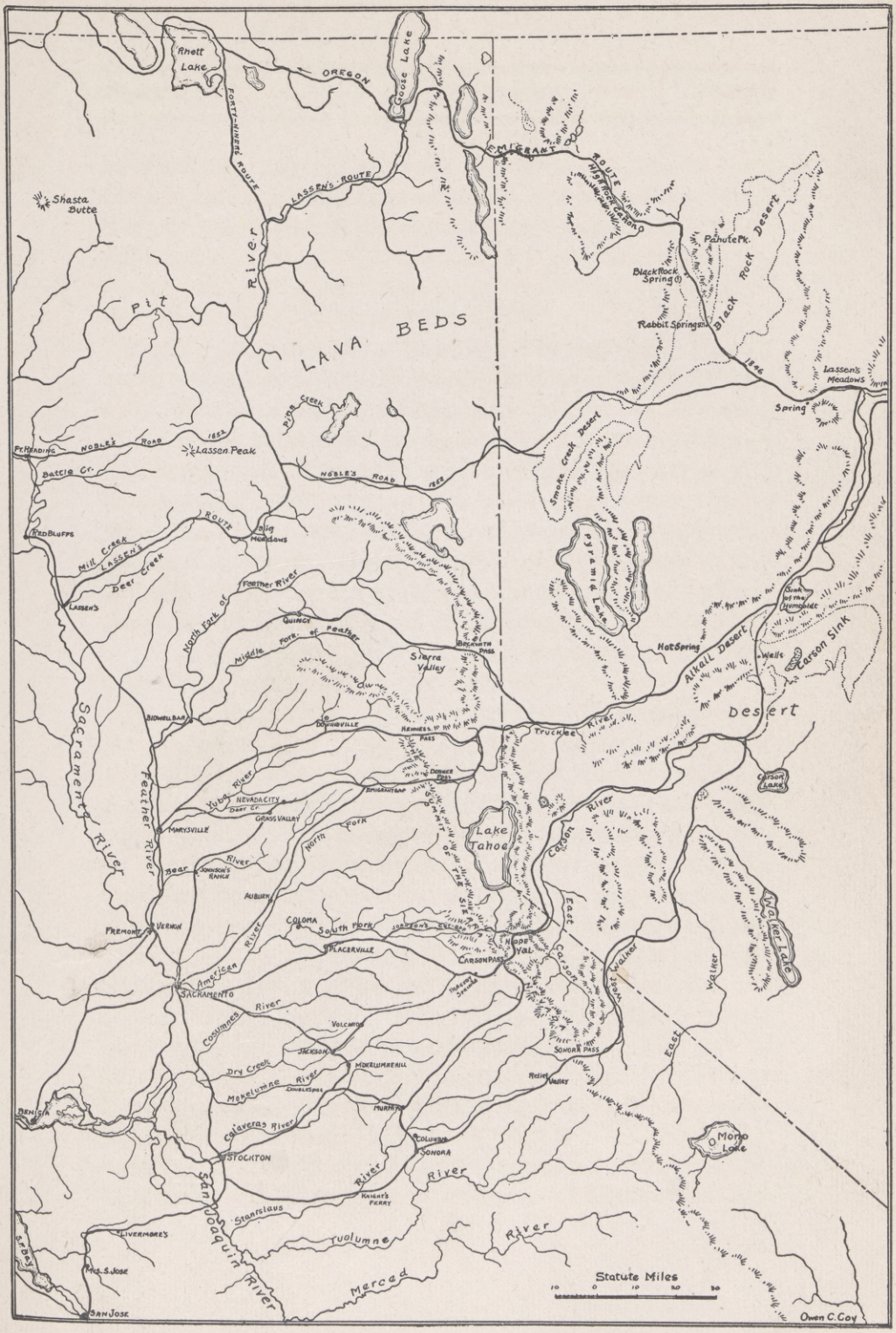
"August 17. As I walked on slowly and with effort, I encountered many animals, perishing for want of food and water, on the desert plain. Some would be just gasping for breath, others unable to stand, would issue low moans as I came up, in a most distressing manner, showing intense agony; and still others, unable to walk, seemed to brace themselves up on their legs to prevent falling, while here and there a poor ox, or horse, just able to drag himself along, would stagger towards me with a low sound, as if begging for a drop of water. My sympathies were excited at their sufferings, yet, instead of affording them aid, I was a subject for relief myself."

Delano's party of emigrants were now at Black Rock

Springs, an oasis in the Black Rock Desert. McGee, the man who had been relied upon to lead them through to California, had left his mule teams here in order to select a way and there were serious doubts among the travelers as to the advisability of the route. One of the party had a copy of Frémont's exploration together with his map and from it they concluded that they were not far from his trail southward when he first went into California. Some proposed following the Frémont trail. From another who had a guide book they learned that they were on the route Applegate had followed to Oregon in 1846. Neither of these reports gave definite data regarding the route to California. On the other hand, definite information began to come to them of Indian depredations in their immediate neighborhood; in fact, the night before a horse and mule had been killed by Indians in the place where they were now camped.

They were not the only emigrants attracted by the stories of the shorter route, for Delano records that "Through the day [August 20] there was a constant arrival of wagons, and by night there were several hundred men together; yet we learned by a mule train that at least one hundred and fifty wagons had turned back to the first spring west of the Humboldt, on learning the dangers of crossing the desert, taking wisely the old road again. This change of route, however, did not continue long, and the rear trains, comprising a large portion of the emigration, took our route, and suffered even worse than we did."

In spite of doubt the emigrant trains pushed steadily on toward their goal, through High Rock Cañon and across the barren lava fields of northwestern Nevada. Here they were surprised to meet men with a drove of fat cattle coming from the west. They learned that this was a party sent out from Oregon with supplies for the troops



Rhett Lake
Goose Lake
OREGON
FORTY-NINERS ROUTE
LASSEN'S ROUTE
EMIGRANT ROUTE
Shasta Butte
Pit River
LAVA BEDS
Pahute Pk.
Black Rock Spring
Black Rock Desert
Rabbit Springs
1846
Lassen's Meadows
Spring
Pine Creek
Smoke Creek Desert
Pt. Reading
Noble's Road
1852
Lassen Peak
Battle Cr.
Red Bluffs
Mill Creek
Lassen's Route
Big Meadows
Deer Creek
Lassen's
Pyramid Lake
Feather River
North Fork of
Quincy
Middle Fork of Feather
Sierra Valley
Beckwith Pass
Hot Spring
Alkali Desert
Sink of the Humboldt
Wells
Carson Sink
Desert
Sacramento River
Biddwell Bar
Downieville
Hennes Pass
Truckee River
Dennes Pass
Carson Lake
Yuba River
Nevada City
Deer Cr.
Grass Valley
Emigrant Gap
Marysville
North Fork
Lake Tahoe
Carson River
Bear River
Johnson's Ranch
Auburn
Summit of the Sierra
East
Fremont
Vernon
Coloma
South Fork
Placerville
Hope Val.
Carson Pass
Carson
West Walker
Walker Lake
American River
Sacramento
Cosumnes River
Volcano
Jackson
Mokelumne Hill
Dry Creek
Mokelumne River
Double Spgs
Sonora Pass
Relief Valley
East
Benicia
Murphys
Calaveras River
Columbia
Sonora
Mono Lake
Stockton
River
Kaight's Ferry
San Joaquin River
Stanislaus
Tuolumne River
Livermore's
S.F. Bay
Mis. S. Jose
San Jose
Merced
Statute Miles
10 0 10 20 30
Owen C. Coy

on the Humboldt; that there was a passable road from Oregon to California along the way they were traveling. Hopes were aroused that soon they would be in the gold fields.

Goose Lake Valley

Nearly two weeks after leaving the Humboldt, Delano's party crossed the divide between the Great Basin and the watershed of the upper Sacramento above Goose Lake. The scenery here was "grand and beautiful," in marked contrast to that upon which they had in the past weeks grown accustomed to gaze. The character of the country began to change, and the soil of Goose Lake Valley was found to be a rich mould. The road led down the valley to the lower extremity of the lake. Here the road forked, the right hand trail leading to Oregon, the left along the upper waters of the Pit River and on toward the California mining region.

By this time their supplies had run exceedingly low. Says Delano: "Our bacon, flour, meal, sugar, and vinegar were all gone, and we had to take felon's fare—hardbread, and water—and this we felt to be much better than nothing; indeed, we were much better off than many others on the road. Mr. Watson had an old cow that the crows had been quarreling over for a long time; and thinking a little fresh beef, (save the mark!) might be acceptable, he slaughtered her. There could not be more rejoicing around the carcass of a camel by the Arabs on the desert, than we evinced around the poor worn out, 'knocked down' brute, and we looked upon it as a sort of God-send, and like to have surfeited ourselves. Being out of meat, it seemed as if our stomachs only craved it the more, and our appetites grew sharper at every halt."

Seeing what appeared to be camp fires across the valley, Delano hoped they might be those of travelers from Ore-

gon to California and that from them supplies might be had to replenish his larder. He hastened on ahead but found that these were the fires of a Missouri emigrant train whose supplies were no better than the others. Their needs were, however, lessened by the fortunate discovery of an Indian cache. "While strolling through the willows, by paths which led to the brook, our men found a basket hanging to a tree, which contained perhaps two bushels of small fish, dried in the sun—a portion of the winter stores of the savages. In the absence of meat, we roasted some of these on the coals, and found them very palatable."

When the junction of the Oregon-California road was reached on September second, there was a feeling that the Sacramento Valley itself could not be far distant—not more than two or three days' travel. The junction of the two trails came at the bend of Pit River just above Big or Round Valley. Through this valley the river flows south, but at its lower end the stream turns abruptly through the mountains toward the west. The trail therefore sought a more even course and led south over the lava plains east of Lassen Peak to the upper waters of the Feather River.

From Big Meadows to Lassen's Post on the Sacramento River at the mouth of Deer Creek lay the last trying stretch of the journey. Seventy miles was the distance, fifty of them over a rough mountain trail along which both grass and water were lacking. Another week was consumed before Delano records:

"The long sought, the long wished-for and welcome valley of the Sacramento, lay before me, five or six miles distant.

"How my heart bounded at the view! how every nerve thrilled at the sight! It looked like a grateful haven to the tempest-tossed mariner, and with long strides, regard-

less of the weariness of my limbs, I plodded on, anxious to set foot upon level ground beyond the barren, mountain desert. I could discern green trees, which marked the course of the great river, and a broad, level valley, but the day was too smoky for a very extended view. There was the resting place, at least for a few days, where the dangerous and weary night-watch was no longer needed; where the habitations of civilized men existed, a security from the stealthy tread of the treacherous savage; where our debilitated frames could be renewed, and where our wandering would cease. Perspiring and fainting from exertion, I reached the foot of the last hill, and stood upon the plain."

The Truckee Route

Fortunately the greater number of emigrants did not turn off to follow the Lassen Trail, but continued their course down the Humboldt River to its sink. For these there was a choice of routes across the mountains through passes approached by way of the Truckee, Carson or Walker rivers. The most direct route to the Northern Mines turned west at the Humboldt Sink toward the Truckee River. Forty miles of hot alkali desert separated the emigrant from the refreshing waters of that stream. There was but one water hole in that distance, a boiling spring halfway across. The diary kept by Mrs. Helen M. Carpenter while crossing the plains in the 'fifties, thus describes this desert journey:

"As it takes 24 hours to cross the desert, it was thought best to start in the evening, so we left camp an hour before sun down. Traveled fast all night; a little before day came to a hot spring which is said to be half way. Stopped to let the cattle rest and get breakfast. As soon as it was light enough to see, found our horse and father's were not with the rest. Reel [her brother] hurriedly ate some

breakfast, & on Farmer's little old pony started back. The spring is six feet wide and 10 feet long—just a big hole of hot water without inlet or outlet. This was the place of all places, where people left everything but themselves, & not satisfied to merely throw their things away, they dumped them *en mess* into the spring. It seemed to be quite full of wagon tires & all kinds of irons belonging to the outfits. Lying about was an endless amount of ox chains, pieces of wagon, &c. &c. The water had no bad taste, so we dipped up and cooled some for the oxen. As the loose stock would not drink from a bucket or pan, they had to go without. The grass brought along was doled out to the oxen. Some of the road up to this point was quite stony. There had also been sand, & the rest of the way was hard clay. We remained at the spring about three hours. At noon, came to a sandy hill where we stopped & gave the oxen some water from the water kegs. A little at a time was put into a pan & held to an oxe's nose, as if it had been put into a bucket, one ox would have gotten the full amount, it would have been impossible to get his head from the water until all was gone, as it was, it was hard to manage them. They pulled and scrouged to get a taste.

"After ascending the hill it was typical desert all the rest of the way. There was deep sand for eight miles, & the road on both sides was strewn with dead cattle. A number in our train succumbed to the heavy travel and heat. Away off to the south could be seen a beautiful river, that looked so cool & peaceful with its clusters of green trees along the banks, that we no longer wondered how it was that a lone weary traveler could desert the road for an elusive mirage. It was hard to believe that we were rightly informed, it certainly was a river but too far away for us to reach. It must have appeared the same to the stock as they became unruly & kept trying to break

away in that direction, the horses especially were determined to go. Dead animals became more frequent, & the articles abandoned were continuous. The sand gradually became a little less deep & about the first intimation that we had of the nearness of the Truckee River, the cattle began to bawl & those that had the strength bolted ahead of the wagons & made for the river, dashing down the steep banks and into the water. The drivers followed pell mell and had great difficulty in keeping them from drinking too much of the very cold water. No sooner were they driven out than they rushed right back, so they had a lively time for a little while."

There may have been some prejudice in the minds of the travelers against the Truckee Trail because of the tragic fate which had overtaken the Donner party on that route. Although shorter, it seems to have been less popular than the Carson Pass road which was the more direct one to Placerville and Coloma as well as to the Southern Mines.

The Carson Route

Fortunately for the emigrants the sink of the Humboldt provided water and grass, both so necessary if the hard journey across the desert was to be made successfully. Usually, therefore, a lay-over of a day was taken to rest, and to feed and water the stock as well as the men for the ordeal ahead. The journal of Jasper Morris Hixson, of Missouri, indicates that his party crossed this part of the route during the third week in July, 1849, and was therefore one of the earliest of the emigrant trains. His detailed account is so interesting that there is a temptation to give it in full but space does not permit other than a few extracts. He says:

"Passing what is known as the sink of the Humboldt, we arrived at the sulphur wells, where we camped, after

traveling forty-five miles—not a sprig of grass for the animals. It was long after dark when we got to the wells. We learned from some of the campers that there were some wide-leaf rushes some distance down the course of the lagoon, which was formed by the water flowing from the pools, or, as they were called, wells. Having given our mules some sulphur water and tying them to the wagons, we started out for some feed. In about half a mile we came to a patch of a growth resembling cane, and with our butcher-knives we each cut a load and brought it to our starved animals. We mixed our parched corn and sugar with some sulphur water as it was called, but it appeared more like a composition alkali and spoiled eggs, but like our famished mules, we were satisfied with almost anything. As there was no fear of Indians, for no Indians ever could have lived in any such place, we soon turned in for a little sleep.

"The first twelve miles of our road this morning was good. Here we reached Salt creek—or rather a slough from the pools—into the waters of which all the substances, such as alkali, borax, salt, etc., had been thrown together. For some distance the surrounding flats were almost impassable, not swampy as one would understand by the word, but rotten. With great difficulty we passed over this place, wagons sinking to the bed, mules miring, etc. After crossing this slough we had a good road for eight miles, when we came to a point of sand of less than a mile, but it gave us a forecast of what we afterwards found for miles. As soon as the wagons got into the sand the mules stopped as though the wheels of the wagons were locked. The sand was as heavy as iron dust. The sand would lift up on the rims of the wheels and spokes and form almost a solid wheel. We had never encountered anything like it, and no pen picture can give one any idea of it. It can only be understood by seeing and experienc-

ing the effect on animals as we did, with our starving and leg-weary animals. After a tedious time of at least one hour we crossed this point and came to a solid road of a chalky formation for two miles, when we reached another stretch of sand. By this time the sun was sinking below the horizon of the great sand domes before us. We unharnessed our animals to give them a chance to roll and enjoy a little rest in the soft smooth road which they were so soon to leave. I would say just here that some mules would starve with food before them if they are not unharnessed, and perish for water before drinking out of a bucket."

Across the Desert

"After preparing some coffee and partaking of some crackers and a cup of what we called coffee made of the stuff we had brought from the pools, and giving the mules the flags we had brought in the wagons and giving those that would drink out of the buckets some water we had brought in the kegs, we were on the road again after a two hours rest. It was now quite dark, and one of the peculiarities of this part of the continent is the blackness of night. The stars may glimmer, but the darkness near the earth is impenetrable."

The hard desert journey continued, stretches of good roadway on "chalky formation" alternating with miles of heavy sand. At last they came to the "great sand desert" ten miles in width. Here they saw the futility of continuing without lightening their wagons. Two wagons were kept to be drawn by ten mules while nine extra mules were packed with supplies. This helped for a time and thus the journey continued until about three o'clock in the morning when the mules refused to go farther. Some time was consumed in a parley as to the best method to pursue—leave the wagons and hasten on for water or

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make another effort to get all through the first time? The decision was in favor of the latter plan and since the time for debate had given the mules a rest they moved along better than before but with none too great promise of success. Hixson continues:

"About this time we noticed one mule in the six-mule team throw up her nose, as though scenting something from afar. Pretty soon another did the same, and we did not move up but a time or two, before we discovered all were doing the same, and we were satisfied they had scented water; and, from that to the river, all of four miles, instead of being urged, they had to be held back for fear they would overdo themselves. It was a lively time for those of us who had the pack mules to lead. Before 9 a. m. we had reached the river, having traveled forty-five miles from our camp at the wells. We gave our mules that would drink from a bucket, a part of a bucket of the most delicious water man or beast ever tasted. Then we turned down the river a few rods, and unhitched and unpacked and turned our animals loose, and it was a pleasure to see those poor dumb brutes go into that beautiful stream and stand and drink; after waiting awhile drink again. They did not appear to crave food as they did water, although they had scarcely had a good feed in 300 miles."

After this refreshing draught, animals and men lay down exhausted. They had made camp "on the bank of the Carson river under the shade of some large cottonwood trees, the first trees we had seen large enough to form a shade in 1,100 miles." During the day other parties came in after the dreadful desert journey. "Men were seen to rush up, half crazed with thirst and hunger and embrace those noble old trees and weep as children, and bless God for their deliverance."

West Carson Cañon

On July 24 Hixson's party started on up the Carson River Valley and five days later were at the base of the Sierra in the cañon of West Carson. Here they found a "register of those ahead with wagons. All told there were eighty-three—our two making to date eighty-five." The account of the trip over the Sierra may be told in Hixson's own words:

"The river flows through a cleft in the mountain, the sides of which are almost perpendicular and several thousand feet high. We had to cross the stream a number of times. In one place the mule on the upper side, in the span next to the tongue in the six-mule team, lost its footing and fell down and in an instant it had washed under the one by its side, and soon both would have drowned but for the prompt action of the boys in the wagon jumping in the water and cutting the harness, enabling the mules to get up. The rocks we had to pass over in the stream, as well as those on the road ranged from the size of a nail-keg to a whisky barrel. But finally we encountered one as large as a sugar hogshead, and that proved too much for one of our wagons. The hind axle of the wagon broke. We soon cut the bed and put the hind wheels on the forward axle and made a cart, loaded the goods into that and proceeded up, up until we reached a narrow valley, a perfect bog, covered with quaking asp but little grass, where we encamped, it then being after dark, having traveled seven miles and a harder day's travel we had not made on the entire trip, men and animals being completely fagged out.

". . . Just ahead was a wall several thousand feet high which had to be climbed to get out of this valley. Had we not seen by the trail and the dust arising from those ahead that others were going that way, we would

have come to the conclusion this was the end of the road and to those ahead the end of time, and they lay at rest in this beautiful lake. But as others had gone up this hill we could do the same. It was called the Devil's Ladder. . . .

"After packing all our loose animals with about all our loading, except the bacon and a few things not easily packed, we hitched twelve mules to a wagon, and by cracking of whips and loud hollowing at the mules and energetic pushing at the wheels by all the available men, we managed to move little by little. When we had reached three-quarters of a mile we had attained an elevation of well on to 1,000 feet. Upward we went for about two miles. When near the top we came to a smooth rock from fifteen to twenty feet, which lay across the road at about the same angle as the remainder of the road. As the mules could get no footing, we had to unhitch, take them above the rock and attach a long rope to the wagon and hitch the mules to the rope, and pull the wagon over the rock. Just here, when the men and animals were almost suffocated with the dust and famished with thirst, there was a most beautiful spring with a bold stream of water coursing down the mountain, the water being forced to the surface by this ledge of rocks which to us had appeared such a formidable barrier, but to us had proved a blessing in disguise. On reaching the summit of this, the first of the Sierra Nevada chain, it was quite dark. After bumping over rocks and through swamps for a mile, we went into camp, having put thirteen miles more behind us.

"Tuesday, July 31, as we had but little feed for our animals, we were out by break of day. Our road at first was down grade, over a volcanic formation, with a stunted chapparal growth. The course was southwest, and it looked like it might be down—down to the land of promise—the great Sacramento valley. A more joyous,

happy lot of fellows was never seen. The old song, 'Going to California, the Gold Pan on my Knee, a-Going to California, the Gold Dust for to See,' was revived and sung with a will, some so hilarious as to throw their hats in the air. As the sun arose some of the boys looked to the north across a valley ahead and saw something against the snow banks that attracted their attention. It first looked like crows; pretty soon we saw it was too large for birds, for they appeared as large at that distance as birds would be if near by us. After looking for a while we concluded they were human beings. . . . It did not take long until others could see wagons and pretty soon all could see men, mules and wagons, and soon the buoyant feeling of an hour before sunk below zero. On reaching a lovely valley after traveling five miles, we camped for breakfast and to graze our animals, having had but little grass the previous night."

Somewhat discouraged by the prospect of crossing another range, some of the men decided to construct a cart of their wagon and with what supplies they could pack upon their mules to strike out across the mountains. All hands helped in this change. "By the time we had helped to get their packs ready it was too late to undertake to cross the mountain just ahead, which was the boss one of all the mountains; we could see it was covered with snow. Just before night a number of wagons arrived in the valley from the diggings, the first party we had seen to tell of the promised land. They were well equipped, good animals, fat and slick, and lots of guns, with which they kept up an almost constant firing until dark. Their whole outfit denoted thrift. They gave a glowing description of the country and the certainty of gold, which to us was good news, and the first that we could consider authentic, for all we had ever heard was the account published in September, 1848, in the Missouri *Republican*, and

the account of the small vial brought from Sutter's mill by a Mormon, who had been discharged from the Mormon battalion that went out during the Mexican war. This party were Mormons, going from the diggings to Salt Lake City. Although their report from the diggings was favorable, the account of the road we had to go over was anything but reassuring."

A Thrifty Cook

The task of working wagons filled with supplies across the Sierra Nevada without a roadway was an arduous one, but there were compensations, as Hixson found. He relates: "While in camp some of those fellows who were trying to be first into the diggings, and had traded their outfit for animals and were now packing, came up to buy some provisions. A good many had been doing the same for the past two hundred miles. We still had quite a surplus, and especially of bacon, which they wanted most. I had let them have some, charging them twenty-five cents per pound. Being cook and commissary, the boys left it to me to do as I pleased, and I thought that a pretty good price, as I had never seen bacon sell for more than seven or eight cents per pound. I noticed those buying never complained about the price, but I attributed it to the superior quality of our bacon, as it had a streak of lean and a streak of fat, claimed by the old fellow we bought it from to be made on purpose for such a trip by feeding his hogs every other day. The buyer always appeared satisfied, and often was willing to take the piece if it was larger than he asked for. I had been saying to the boys this morning I did not intend to let those packers have any more bacon for less than thirty-seven and a half cents per pound. I was not going to haul bacon up such a place as the 'Devil's Ladder' and then over a mountain so high as to have snow thirty feet deep in August and sell it to

Franz Geritz

those fellows for twenty-five cents. Pretty soon up came a fellow and wanted some bacon. 'All right, but you will have to pay thirty-seven and a half cents.' 'Get it out.' I cut off a slice, and got the money in silver, $8.62½ cents, which looked to me almost as big as the piece of bacon. So I said: 'No more bacon for sale.' I would not commence highway robbery. Afterwards I found the few traders scattered along the Carson and some as far as the desert were charging $1.50 per pound, and when we got to the embarcadero at Sacramento city, our bacon was worth 62½ cents at wholesale, and we had enough left at that price to pay for all our provisions, bacon, flour, beans, coffee, sugar, rice, etc., etc., in Missouri. I could understand their buying at the price without grumbling. Later on I dropped some of those conscientious scruples about high prices, and gradually fell into the ways of the country. As we passed two springs that day, that afterwards became famous in history (Tragedy and Leak springs) the reader will locate where we were."

California at Last

August 4 found this party on the western slope of the Sierra sixty-five miles from Sacramento. Here they were to have their first contact with the Californian in California. "While eating we saw two horsemen come dashing up, one following the other. On reigning up, it was done so suddenly the first horse almost set back on his haunches. We saw at a glance it was master and servant, or king and peasant. A finer specimen of man and a more superb animal I had never seen. The invitation was given to partake of some refreshments, and readily accepted. We soon found he was a merchant from Sacramento City, out looking for wagons and teams to haul provisions to the mines, and from him we learned there was plenty of gold, and the country was well filled by

those who had come from all parts of the world by water, as well as a large proportion of the people from Oregon, many of the Oregonians having been here the year previous and returned and put in their crops and were returning for another fall and winter in the diggings. We were not long in striking up a trade. We engaged to deliver our wagon and six mules to him in Sacramento for $1,200, he paying what he called $100—six gold pieces that he called six ounces—Spanish coin. He was a pleasant gentleman and a good talker, and his theme was one we were all so much interested in, we regretted to have him leave, but he said he must be in Sacramento that night.

"On mounting his horse, which was brought up by a groom, and, waving a cordial adieu, his noble chestnut dashed off like a flash and was soon out of sight. We were mute with astonishment to meet a man of his appearance away up here in the wilds, fifty miles from what we supposed was the outlying settlement, and he talked of making that fifty miles with as little concern as we would have done to go ten or fifteen miles at home, and there was a vim and energy to his movements that convinced us we had reached a healthy country.

"We made a good drive and reached the first spring and swampy ground after coming down the dividing ridge, where we camped. This afterwards was called Diamond Springs."

Two days later the company reached Sutter's Fort where they put up camp. Hixson had an irrepressible desire to see the "Embarcadero," as Sacramento City was called, and, moreover, he wanted fresh meat. "Bacon is a mighty good thing for the plains," he says, "but when you have been eating bacon and drinking coffee without milk, and having nothing in the shape of vegetable matter but beans and rice for three months, one wants sweet and sour as well as fresh meat. When I rode into the cluster of shan-

ties—not more than half a dozen, with shake roofs on them, and got the odor of new-made baker's bread, I could not resist the temptation of one square meal. I bought a bottle of vinegar, a bottle of syrup, a loaf of baker's bread, and filling my canteen with fresh water—having my tin plate and tin cup strapped to my saddle—I got astraddle of a big oak tree that had fallen on L street, near Seventh, and mixed my syrup, vinegar and water for a drink, and sopped my fresh baker's bread in the syrup, and ate one of the most enjoyable meals I ever had before or since. I returned to camp, and between the grey squirrels the boys had killed and the fine beef I had bought, we had a feast that night. My meal had just whetted my appetite."

Chapter VIII

CHAPTER VIII

Over Southern Plains

HISTORIANS OF the westward movement from the Mississippi have devoted considerable attention to the popular northern routes, but have had little to say of the emigration which moved California-ward by the southern trails. The facts indicate, however, that a goodly number of gold seekers reached California by routes through Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

Reports of the trying experiences of the water route, its long duration and the difficulties of crossing the Isthmus, led many victims of the gold fever to investigate the enthusiastic claims then being made by southwestern towns for the southern trails.

In December of 1848 the *New York Tribune*, which had strongly proclaimed the advantages of the water route, expressed the belief that for those gold seekers who lived in the Mississippi Valley the southern route by way of the Gila River offered superior advantages. Other papers joined in this discussion. The timely publication by the government of the report of General Stephen W. Kearny's expedition, with a full account of the wagon expedition of Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, added a more practical element in the way of definite information. This re-

port was reprinted and discussed in various papers of the Texas and Gulf cities, with the result that while snows still covered the Great Plains and blocked the passes of the Rockies and Sierra Nevada, eager gold seekers along the frontier of the southern states were already on their way to the newly discovered El Dorado.

Although some of these southern routes had the disadvantage of running for a part of their way through Mexican territory and in a region where water was not abundant, they had several obvious advantages. A study of the map indicated that the distance from the frontier of settlement to California by any southern route would be shorter than the better known Platte Trail. The winter was mild and spring came early. Furthermore, many men who had served in the recent war with Mexico had acquired at least a general knowledge of the country and guides were easily available.

Southern papers, seeing the advantages to be gained for their region, eagerly seized the opportunity of calling attention to the benefits of an early start across the route which had been successfully used by the United States Army. It was apparent to them that if a southern route could be successfully exploited, the monopoly of St. Louis as the depot for all westward migration might be broken. As an example of the publicity printed by such journals, Professor Ralph P. Bieber, in his excellent paper on "Southwestern Trails to California," quotes the Houston *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* of February 15, 1849, as follows:

"These emigrants, therefore, may actually be digging in the gold mines of San Francisco or Los Angeles, before the emigrants left at St. Louis can commence their journey. The peach trees here are in blossom, the grass is springing up fresh upon the prairies, and the Spring birds are singing merrily, while, according to Telegraph accounts etc.,

St. Louis' cold chilly winter still chains the rivers with icy bands and covers the prairies with his snowy mantle."

Publicity of this kind, coming at the time when the gold fever was raging, brought thousands of gold seekers to the southwestern frontier. According to Doctor Bieber, contemporary reports show that people from nearly every state in the Union prepared to travel these routes to California in 1849. He says:

"Hundreds of emigrants congregated at Boston, New York, Mobile, and New Orleans, where ships were chartered to convey them to the Texas ports of Brazos Santiago, Corpus Christi, Port Lavaca, and Galveston. Others traveled from Philadelphia and Baltimore, partly by rail and partly by stage, to Pittsburgh or Wheeling, where river transportation was available to the western border. Many emigrants west of the Allegheny Mountains embarked on river steamers at Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville on the Ohio, and at St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, and New Orleans on the Mississippi, and pursued their way to the frontier towns of Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas by way of the Missouri River, the Arkansas River, or the Gulf of Mexico."

Across Northern Mexico

Because of the mild climate along the Gulf, the southern Texas ports were the most popular for the emigrants who started early in 1849. Two thirds of all the states of the Union were represented in the great throng that crowded into Brownsville, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Austin and Fredericksburg. From these towns the trails through northern Mexico offered favorable inducements for an early start. From Brownsville and Mier the route used by Gen. Zachary Taylor in the Mexican war led to the Mexican towns of Monterey, Saltillo and Parras. From Corpus Christi a much-used trail led southwest to

Laredo and from there to Monterey and Parras. For those starting from San Antonio there was a route which crossed the Rio Grande at Eagle Pass and reached Parras by the way of Monclova. This route had been used by General Wool in the war with Mexico and many were familiar with its course.

From Parras three routes led toward the Pacific, one to the southwest to Durango and Mazatlán where a boat could be taken to California, and two to the northwest to Parral and Chihuahua. From the latter point the greater number of travelers turned north to Janos and at Guadalupe Pass joined the route used by Colonel Cooke; but some crossed the Sierra Madre from Chihuahua to Ures and Altar and then turned north to meet the Cooke route near Tucson.

The journey over these routes required from three to six months. The hardships of the trip through northern Mexico were few in comparison to the dangers of some of the other trails and when the journey was made in the early spring the weather was pleasant. It was by these trails that the first travelers to the California mines arrived overland from the states.

Exploration in Western Texas

The trails through northern Mexico had been used since the days of the *adelantados* but those leading westward from central and northern Texas were of more recent date; in fact, exploration of them was not complete when the gold fever swept over the states. Soon after the close of the Mexican War the citizens of San Antonio began to devise ways and means to hold the trade of west Texas, New Mexico and Chihuahua. It was considered that a wagon road from San Antonio to El Paso and Chihuahua would be the best possible means. An exploring expedition had been sent out under Colonel John C. Hays, who

later became famous in California as the sheriff of San Francisco in Vigilante days. Hays' report favored a road from San Antonio to El Paso by way of the San Saba and Pecos rivers.

Early in 1849 the War Department sent out Lieutenants W. H. C. Whiting and W. F. Smith to find a good route for military and commercial purposes. Their westward survey was along the route previously recommended by Colonel Hays. Because of the scarcity of water on the Staked Plains between the San Saba and Pecos rivers these men on their return sought a different route. From El Paso they went down the Rio Grande about a hundred miles, then crossed to the Pecos River which they followed almost to its mouth. Then they went eastward along the base of the bluffs, crossing Las Moras Creek and other streams and on to San Antonio. This return route they recommended as being the proper one for a wagon road. Their report did not satisfy the people of Austin, who sent out another expedition to make a more complete survey of the route suggested by Colonel Hays. Major R. S. Neighbors, Indian agent in Texas, and Dr. John S. Ford were chosen to make further exploration, and in due time they reported favorably for a route extending more nearly west from Austin. This led to Fredericksburg and then northwest by the Llano and San Saba rivers to Brady's Creek and Concho River. From the head of this river the route led across the Staked Plains to the Pecos River at Horsehead Crossing, thence up the river and through the Guadalupe Range to El Paso on the Rio Grande. In this manner during the early months of 1849 two distinct routes (known respectively as the Upper and Lower Emigrant Roads) came to be surveyed across Texas. For data on these trails the student of southwestern history is indebted to Mabelle Eppard Martin.

Upper Texas Emigrant Road

The gold seekers of 'forty-nine could not wait for road surveys and while the explorations were being made hundreds of emigrants were landing at Brazos, Corpus Christi and Lavaca and many more were crowding in by roads from the Mississippi River towns. During January and February many small parties had left San Antonio, Houston, Galveston and other places for the frontier, and at Fredericksburg, just west of Austin, they gathered into larger companies for the westward journey. Here in February, 1849, Captain Mays formed a company which was the first of any size to arrive at El Paso. They were reported to have reached the valley of the Rio Grande near El Paso within sixteen days after leaving Fredericksburg. By the middle of March the Austin Company struck out for the plains, followed by others, so that by April emigrant parties were leaving Austin and San Antonio almost daily and wagon trains including women and children were frequent. Although the earliest venturers had come from southeastern Texas, other states were later represented, for parties were reported from Missouri, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee and Indiana.

Most of these emigrants followed the Upper Road. While the Mays company had succeeded in getting through in a very satisfactory manner, other companies, not so well equipped with supplies and guides, suffered greatly. Many were lost upon the arid plains and had to spend days without water. Some of them perished from starvation. The road from the Pecos to El Paso was the most difficult part of the journey, for the mountain passes were not easily located by inexperienced travelers. Later emigrants, however, found a worn trail which could easily be followed all the way to El Paso.

In the pages of the diary of Cornelius C. Cox, who used the Upper Road during the early months of 1849, an interesting record is given of the experiences encountered upon his journey. With a small company, Mr. Cox set out from Harrisburg, near Houston, Texas, in April, 1849. At La Grange, where they crossed the Rio Colorado, they found great interest in the gold region and many emigrant companies in process of formation. The frontier town was Fredericksburg. Here, at the edge of settlement, the emigrants organized themselves into companies before venturing out into the unsettled area. The company of which Cox was a member numbered fifty-five, having ten wagons and twenty-five pack mules.

From Fredericksburg the party followed the route of the emigrants of a few weeks earlier, going north to the Llano River, a pretty stream abounding in fish and having excellent grass along its sides. From the Llano they crossed westward to the San Saba and on to the Rio Concho, which was separated from the San Saba by a dry march of fifty or more miles. Here the emigrants found themselves approaching the arid plains of western Texas. The Concho itself was "a dirty sluggish stream with water having a very disagreeable taste." Of the next stretch of travel the diary says:

"From the head of the Concho to this River, the Country may be termed a perfect waste, it is in fact a vast plain, without timber or water, and but little grass, and yet we made this drive, a distance of seventy miles in two days —I never saw the earth so dry as it is in this district, vegitation is completely burned up, & every water hole is dry as a 'bone yard'. . . . I hope that I may never experience the want of water again, or witness the like suffering that our men and Horses endured. The weather has been oppressive, and the dust upon the road almost suffocating."

The party reached the Rio Pecos probably at Horsehead Crossing and proceeded to cross to the opposite side. Although the river at this point was "deep, swift, and muddy" they had no great difficulty in crossing, because one of the members was especially prepared for such emergencies by having a water-tight wagon bed with the ends turned up in the shape of a scow. Oars were carried on the side of the wagon bed.

Guadalupe Pass of Texas

The route up the west bank of the Pecos did not afford pleasant travel, for the region was barren of animal life and almost entirely void of vegetation. An occasional rattlesnake was the only living creature to be seen. Nine days were spent in ascending the Pecos before they reached Delaware Creek, a small tributary entering from the west. The trail followed up this creek toward Guadalupe Pass which led westward through the Guadalupe Range toward the settlement at El Paso. The company was surprised to find others camped near the pass. "A company of eight or ten families from Eastern Texas are encamped here, they have a Blacksmith shop, cords of Children and a few Milch Cows—I can scarcely realize at this time that we are so far from Civilization—the Sound of the Anvil, squalling of Children, and an occasional idler promenading the lines reminds one of the city rather than the Wilds—"

On June 18 the company crossed the Guadalupe Range which divides the Pecos from the Rio Grande. Regarding the crossing of this range, Harris, another member of the Harrisburg party, wrote:

"After travelling about 6 miles we came to the Pass in the mountains, and I would that I had the power of description to give you an idea of the magnificence of the scene. We wound round the mountain we were on to get

into the valley below, on the ledge for about a quarter of a mile, and then descended by fastening a rope behind the wagon, and all hands taking hold to back and keep the wagon from upsetting. In this way I suppose we made a descent of at least 1,000 feet. After getting in the valley below and looking up at the wagons winding around on the ledge above, it would then almost make a persons head swim, but the road is not as bad as it looks, for we were not detained with our loaded wagons 2 hours in getting the wagons over it, and there had been no work on it whatever, except throwing out the largest of the rocks. Here we passed around the Guadalupe cliff which has the appearance of a huge Cathedral. The base of it is I suppose 5,000 or 6,000 feet high from the valley below, and then the cliff rises above, something in the shape of a steeple (in front) something like 1,200 to 1,500 feet perpendicular, of solid rock. . . ."

After crossing the mountain word was received that there would be no more water along the road until they had reached the Rio Grande, a distance of 80 or 100 miles. They were then encamped at "a hole of bad water pretty strong of sulphur and salt.

"The water here was doing our animals no good, and it was a hard thing to go back to the next spring. Soon after we got in, cattle, mules and horses by scores came from 25 or 30 miles ahead. Murchison's, Thompson's and Thorn's companies having gone on expecting to find water, they had to send their stock all back to water. We determined to remain until it rained, unless they succeded in getting water by digging, for which purpose we sent out men after staying at the water hole three or four days (it raining a little every evening after we arrived there), then came up a heavy shower from the west, and we concluded it must have reached the water rock, and we started, after filling everything with water, after going five or six

miles, we came where we could dip up the rain water, and changed our salt water for fresh, and I felt tolerably safe. Before we reached the mountains, we found the rain could not have reached them, and we became somewhat uneasy, although I believe the rain water I had would have taken us through. When we came to the mountain, which is nothing more than a mountain of immense rocks piled upon each other in every manner and form. They look as if they had been thrown into the air and come down as it happened. Here we found it had barely sprinkled, not sufficient to lay the dust, but such was the size of the rocks and their facility of conducting water into different natural basins that we found plenty for ourselves and our animals. The rain after that had been very heavy and we found plenty of water to the river. . . ." On June 21 the party had reached the Hueco (Waco) Tanks, about thirty miles northeast of El Paso, where they found a number of other California emigrant companies already encamped.

Members of the Harrisburg Company were well pleased with their success and had many words of praise for the route over which they had traveled. They had been "two months and ten days on the road, and without having an accident, a loss, or even a case of sickness to record—and last, but not least—without having seen an Indian or a Buffalo by the way—We estimate the distance from Houston to El Passo at Eight hundred miles—probably the best natural road of the same length in the United States —passing through a Country as least two thirds of the distance adapted to all kinds of agricultural and manufacturing purposes and possessing a climate temperate and genial. From my observations of the Country I am satisfied that it is entirely practicable for a Rail Road from Buffalo Bayou to El Passo, and feel convinced that if one ever reached the Pacific it will be by this rout."

Lower Texas Emigrant Road

While these expeditions were using the Upper Route others were pioneering the Lower Route. The first of these were emigrants who had arrived by water at Corpus Christi and Lavaca bays. In January parties began to arrive in southern Texas, many of them led by Mexican War veterans who planned to reach California through northern Mexico. Since the people of Corpus Christi and neighboring towns were anxious to develop a road to El Paso, they encouraged the gold seekers to go that way. Mr. Peoples, editor of *The Corpus Christi Star*, himself joined these gold seekers.

Those assembled in January numbered about one hundred men who started on their westward march during the latter part of the month. Difficulties developed before they had proceeded far and the company broke up, but Peoples and about twenty-five of the men continued and were among the first parties of gold seekers to reach California overland, arriving at San Diego in June of 1849. Other gold seekers followed these expeditions. Early in June a large company of emigrants left San Antonio over the Lower Road. With them was Colonel Jack Hays. They were especially favored in being permitted to accompany a detachment of United States troops that had been ordered to construct a wagon road over the route recommended by Lieutenants Whitney and Smith. The real permanence of the Lower Route was assured by the action of the army engineers who selected it as the best route for the transport of military supplies along the border, and established army posts along it at convenient intervals. With this prestige the Lower Route soon became the more popular of the two Texas routes.

Many variations of the upper and lower routes resulted from lack of knowledge of these main trails. Anxious

gold seekers took whatever route appeared most likely to lead to the desired goal. Some turned to the Rio Grande near Presidio del Norte at the mouth of the Mexican Conchos River and found a rather difficult way up the river to El Paso, a place most welcome after the hardships of the desert country.

Fort Smith to El Paso

Northern Texas also joined in the effort to secure a share of the traffic of the gold seekers, for a trail ran southwesterly across Texas from Fort Smith on the Arkansas River and from Dallas and Preston to the Pecos River where it joined with the trails from southern Texas. This route had been used as early as 1840 by a trading expedition to Chihuahua, but no definite indications of that trail were left to guide the 'Forty-niners. Users of this route were for the most part residents of northern Texas and neighboring regions.

The blacksmith whose anvil broke the soundless monotony of the wilderness at Guadalupe Pass was one of the Red River Company which crossed northwestern Texas by the route under consideration. After crossing the Red River at Preston near the mouth of the Washita, it left the frontier of settlement, passed above the Cross Timbers of the upper Trinity and Rio Brazos to Big Springs on the upper Colorado, then over the Staked Plains to the Rio Pecos which it crossed a short distance above Horsehead Crossing. At that point it joined the Upper Texas Road which was followed to El Paso.

The Fort Smith-El Paso route was explored by Captain Randolph B. Marcy early in 1849 and a few years later became well known as the route of the Overland Mail. It was, however, not so popular in 1849 as the many other routes mentioned, doubtless because the distance to be

traveled through uninhabited country in northwestern Texas was longer than by the rival roads.

Doctor Bieber estimates that over three hundred people, including several families, some with wagons and equipment, made their way to the gold region across these trails of northwestern Texas in 1849. Their journey began during March, April, or May, and occupied from five to seven months.

Fort Smith to Santa Fé

Still farther north were the routes which followed up the Canadian River from Fort Smith and Van Buren on the western frontier of Arkansas to Santa Fé. These routes were not new, for they had been used by the early Spanish and French explorers and Indian traders. Josiah Gregg in 1839 and 1840 led a trading caravan through this country and others had crossed frequently between Fort Smith and Santa Fé.

So sure were the people of Fort Smith that this was the logical route for California emigrants that in September, 1848, before knowledge of the gold discovery had become general, they had petitioned Congress to authorize the survey and establishment of a national road from Fort Smith to California. This petition had received the favorable recommendation of the military committee of the Senate and was awaiting further action when the gold fever began in the eastern states.

Realizing the need for displaying immediately the advantages of the Arkansas Route, Senator S. G. Borland of that state secured from the War Department an order for a military escort to accompany the emigrants westward to Santa Fé. Captain Marcy was dispatched to command the expedition and with Lieutenant James H. Simpson was ordered to make a preliminary survey of the route traveled.

"Promise of government protection," says Doctor Bieber, "led many emigrants to choose the route through Arkansas as the best way to the gold mines. During the spring and summer of 1849 about three thousand gold-seekers from at least twenty-six states assembled at Fort Smith and Van Buren, the principal points of departure for California in western Arkansas. The largest number came from New York and the southern states. Numerous river steamers were kept busy night and day transporting the gold seekers up the Arkansas to Fort Smith and Van Buren. These towns, as well as several other towns along the river, furnished the emigrants with some of their supplies for the western journey. Fort Smith did an especially large business and was exceedingly anxious to demonstrate that it was not merely a military post but a thriving town capable of supplying travelers with anything they desired except wagons and firearms. It also boasted, as did the other towns, that there was no danger from cholera within its limits. The coming of the forty-niners led many people of Arkansas, like those of Texas, to become greatly excited at the prospect of being on the main highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Fort Smith believed that ere long it would become 'the great starting point to Northern Mexico, California, and Oregon.' Van Buren had visions of rivaling St. Louis in population and wealth and becoming 'the depot of the rich trade of India.' The editor of the *Arkansas State Democrat*, commenting on the large number of California emigrants passing through Little Rock, enthusiastically declared that in a few years he expected to 'hob-nob on the side-walks with Chinamen,' and prophesied that 'Arkansas must soon become a central point on the great commercial highway of the world.' "

The first gold seekers to use this route left Fort Smith in March, 1849, going westward up the Canadian branch

of the Arkansas. An older trail followed up the north side of the Canadian for nearly two hundred miles until it reached Chouteau's Trading Post, where it crossed to the south side and was joined by the new trail marked out by Captain Marcy, who had kept to the south of the river after leaving Fort Smith. The Canadian River afforded a very convenient passageway through the Great Plains to the Pecos River and Santa Fé, and with the exception of the difficulty due to the boggy roads before reaching the Great Plains, the emigrants who followed this trail had comparatively few hardships.

The Cherokee Trail

From Fort Smith still another trail led to California. Captain Marcy speaks of it as the "Cherokee Trail" and says that it was used by large parties of California emigrants and that by the middle 'fifties it was ' well tracked and defined." This trail pushed northwesterly from Fort Smith to Fort Gibson, where it crossed Grand River, thence to the Verdigris and across to the west side of the Arkansas River near the mouth of the Salt Fork. It then followed a northwesterly course probably up the Salt Fork and met the Arkansas again above the Big Bend near Fort Mann. The trail then proceeded up the Arkansas to Bent's Fort, thence northward along the foot of the Rockies to the headwaters of the South Platte and across to Fort Bridger to join one of the regular westward trails.

Notice of a "new trail" which was probably a forerunner of the Cherokee Trail appeared in the papers of the Ohio Valley in March, 1849. One item states that the California Mutual Protection Company, organized in New York, planned to go to Cincinnati where there would be built a boat 160 feet long, propelled by twenty-four wheels, twelve on each side, to be worked by hand. The route of travel was to be down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to

the Arkansas River, which would be ascended to Bent's Fort. There horses and mules could be obtained to convey the party direct to the mines. "The cost of the whole trip," reads the account, "will not be more than one hundred dollars each and it will land the party in the most productive section, instead of at San Francisco which is seventy miles from the mines."

In an earlier chapter the story of the Santa Fé caravans has been given largely in the words of Dr. Josiah Gregg. Since the beginning of that trade in the early 'twenties the trail from western Missouri to Santa Fé had been well traveled. When the gold fever began to sweep over the population of the Mississippi Valley there were many who thought first of the Santa Fé Trail. Thus it was that during the summer of 1849 between two and three thousand emigrants turned to California by way of Independence and Santa Fé. The peril of attempting the crossing of the mountains late in the season, the dangers from the cholera, and the lack of grass for animals all helped to divert the emigrants to the safer, albeit longer, southern trails.

In addition to the regular routes that have been considered, there were many others not so well defined but nevertheless used by parties of gold seekers. Some of them might be characterized as distinct routes, but most of them were variants of other trails.

In 1848 Colonel John C. Frémont left the Missouri frontier for the California mines. He had previously made two expeditions to California and was therefore familiar with the western trails. The route selected by him was a variation of the Santa Fé Trail which took him to Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River. Because of very heavy snows during the winter of 1848-49, Frémont was unable to get through the mountains and after two desperate months arrived at Taos in February, 1849. Twelve of his men had

perished in the snow storms and all the pack mules and equipment were lost. From the Rio Grande Valley the remainder of the party proceeded west along Cooke's route of 1846.

The Rio Grande Valley

By means of the various trails mentioned and others whose records have escaped notice, the valley of the upper Rio Grande from Santa Fé to El Paso was filled with gold seekers during the summer of 1849. The Independence and Fort Smith trails came into the valley at or just south of Santa Fé, while the Texas trails entered the upper Rio Grande country near El Paso.

To the weary traveler who had been forced to cross the parched plains, the valley was a welcome sight and nearly every company took occasion to halt there to give men and beasts an opportunity to recuperate before resuming the westward journey. It therefore became a stopping place for all travelers on the southern routes and from Santa Fé to El Paso every town and village had its full share of California emigrants during the summer of 1849.

El Paso, the point of convergence of the Texas trails, was in 1849 a Mexican town of about 4,000 inhabitants located on the west, or Mexican side, of the river. This town, the first to be seen after the hard experiences of the desert, created a very favorable impression upon the emigrants. Says one, "The sight of this little place is truly refreshing to the weary traveller of the plains—indeed, the cool shady avenues, fragrant breezes, delicious fruits and luxuriant appearance of every thing around, makes one almost feel that he is transported to the bowers of Eden. The productions of this place are Corn, Wheat, Beans, Vegetables and fruits of every variety. Great care and attention is paid to the culture of the Grape and considerable Wine is manufactured—The Houses are built of

Adobe, flatroofed and one story high—they are comfortable both in summer and winter and said to be very durable—The church which is the largest building in the place is about forty by one hundred feet in dimensions and two stories high. The interior is very handsomely carved and orniamented, it is situated in the Grand Plaza and about the center of the town—The whole valley is irrigated by means of a acquiduct which leads from the falls of the River one mile above the town—There is but little to sell here and everything commands a high price."

With the migration of 1849 there also grew up a new El Paso on the American side of the Rio Grande. A Santa Fé trader from Missouri, foreseeing the possibilities of development to follow the American conquest, had acquired title to the rancho opposite El Paso and turned his freight wagons from Santa Fé to this point. The people of Texas likewise saw the opportunities here and many brought full stocks of provisions with a view to possible sales at this place. Among the residents of early El Paso was "The Great Western," a woman who kept a hotel. One diarist recalls that "She was very tall, large & well made. She had the reputation of being something of the roughest fighter on the Rio Grande; and was approached in a polite, if not humble manner by all of us, the writer in particular."

Chapter IX

CHAPTER IX

The Gila Route

"THE FURTHER we went the worse the way got—we did not know what to do, some spoke of returning to Santa Fee and remaining a month or two to recruit their mules, and those of us who were anxious to go ahead regretted we had not packed from Santa Fee over the old Spanish trail, toward evening Brownlee and Galloway came up from Santa Fee and told us that the companies were all coming this rout, which gave us some better spirits. . . ."

Thus reads the diary of Caspar S. Ricks who came to California in the migration of 1849 and was later one of the founders of the town of Eureka. His party had come to the upper Rio Grande Valley by way of the Canadian River or Fort Smith route. Upon reaching the outskirts of Santa Fé they had turned south in order to follow the Gila route; thence they traveled the length of the Rio Grande Valley from Santa Fé to the point where the California trail turned west.

The choice of routes to California had been a perplexing question. There were, in fact, at least four different routes westward from the Rio Grande Valley. The "Old Spanish Trail" mentioned by Ricks led northwest from Santa Fé over the Wolfskill route, reaching the upper val-

ley of the Colorado north of the Grand Cañon and then proceeding to Southern California by the Salt Lake route over the Mojave Desert. Three other routes converged upon the Gila River at or near the Pima Villages, followed the river to Yuma and then crossed the Colorado Desert.

One of these ran almost directly west from Santa Fé to the old pueblo town of Zuñi and thence down to the Gila. This trail had been known since the days of the fur traders. Another trail led from the copper mines at Santa Rita down almost the full length of the Gila River. This was known as the Pattie route, and was used by General Kearny in 1846. Although shorter than the others, it was quite rough and suitable only for pack trains. Most of the emigrants to California by southern routes chose a still different trail known as the main Southern Emigrant Road. This followed, in part, Colonel Cooke's Wagon Road, taking them south of the Kearny or Gila route, across the northern part of the Chihuahua Desert, the uplands that are now in southern Arizona and New Mexico.

In the Valley of the Rio Grande

On June 28 Ricks' company reached the Rio Grande about a mile and a half below Albuquerque, where they found numbers of emigrants awaiting their turn to cross the river. While camped at this ferry several of the companies were reorganized. Ricks and his immediate party joined the "Little Rock Company" who had obtained the use of the ferry to cross the river.

The Rio Grande was not to be crossed without difficulties, says Ricks, "for the river was very high and the current very swift, our boat was small, hardly room for our wagon, we concluded to swim our stock and ferry across our wagon—accordingly some were selected, to manage the boat while the rest were detailed to carry

over the mules, we drove them up the river about a mile and with great difficulty got a few of them in the water, at first they all refused to go to the water, and a Mexican we had hired in our mess for the purpose of herding our mules mounted a horse and as swift as the current was he succeeded in getting over, we then put in a single horse which swam down the current some distance and then turned and came out on the same side he had went in at, my favorite mule the one I had got to ride was then driven in with the saddle on and the bridle carefully tied up at first he seemed to swim finely—but the current was so rapid he took a notion to go back, he was prevented by those that were on the bank, he then tried to cross over to the opposite bank, and was drifted down about a mile, before he was able to reach the opposite bank—when he got there he was unable to get out without assistance and lay down in the edge of the water perfectly exhausted. . . ."

The journey down the Rio Grande was by a road which led through heavy sand along the river and was destitute of any kind of timber. Wood for camp fuel could not be found. As a substitute the travelers resorted to the dried stalks of wild sugar, common in New Mexico. Two small towns were passed during the first day's journey from Albuquerque and "although not so large," writes Ricks, "as some others we had passed through yet appeared to be in a far more flourishing condition, each of them had their vineyards, and fruit orchards, and the native simplicity and neatness attached to the Pueblo village [Isleta] was to me particularly striking as well as interesting, . . ."

As the party advanced the road was found to be hard on the draft animals because of the heavy sand and lack of grass for feed. Farther on, the sandy river bed grew too narrow to afford a passage and the train was forced

to take to the rougher high land. Occasional ranchos and villages were passed in the Rio Grande Valley but none of importance until they came to Socorro. The Little Rock, Clarkeville and Davis companies all camped together near this town because the grass was good, although they had to go some distance for water and were entirely without wood.

The town of Socorro was described as "a dirty uncomfortable place it has some few small vineyards, and a few apricot trees, the fruit of the first though was not ripe and that of the latter was entirely gone, the town is said to contain some 8,000 inhabitants[.] Some few miles from the town a large warm spring bursts from a mountain, the volume of water which comes from it is amply sufficient at all seasons of the year to turn a great mill which is built upon it, and does the principal grinding for the citizens of the town—its water[s] flow through the town and supply them all with the water they use, they made us pay nine dollars for a fanager [fanega=1.60 bu.] of meal, which is 140 pounds."

The trail continued down the Rio Grande, sometimes following along the bed of the river, at other times turning aside over rough table land to avoid the protruding banks of the stream.

The emigrants finally reached a point on the Rio Grande where it was customary to leave that stream, since there the trail down its course became increasingly difficult, and also because it began there to take a direction away from the general line of march.

When about opposite Fra Cristobal on the Rio Grande some of the emigrants became impatient of the slow progress. "The Clarkeville company," says Ricks, "that had camped near us drove off leaving 3 wagons which they abandoned to their fate their object was to rid themselves of every incumbrance and lighten themselves as much as

possible, their loads were decreasing every day and they resolved to abandon their wagons as fast as they could do without them."

Westward from El Paso

From El Paso two routes led westward and converged at Guadalupe Pass near the southern corner common to the present states of New Mexico and Arizona. One of these routes led southwest and west from El Paso to Corralitas, a small place on the old Chihuahua road, thence by the Guadalupe Pass to San Bernardino, Santa Cruz and Tucson. The other route from El Paso went up the Rio Grande about sixty miles and crossed to the west side near the town of Doña Ana. From here it took a northwesterly direction and joined the route from Santa Fé.

Since this latter road ran on American soil, it was much more popular with the California emigrants than the southern route which lay entirely through Mexican territory from El Paso to the Yuma crossing. For this reason it was the route followed by the greater number of Texas emigrants.

It led them through a country that gave the appearance of once having been under cultivation, for the remains of many irrigation ditches, although nearly filled up, were still to be seen. The first town reached was Doña Ana, not far from the international boundary line of 1849. Here during the summer of 1849 were stationed two companies of United States troops, and at the government store the emigrants could purchase supplies at prices which seemed to them to be exorbitant. Before the American Conquest Doña Ana had been a town of five thousand or more inhabitants but during the war many of the Mexicans had moved across the river into what they thought to be Mexican territory.

Above Doña Ana the emigrant trail crossed the Rio

Grande and continued northward on the west side for a few miles until it reached the point near which Colonel Philip St. George Cooke had turned west in 1846. Here the route merged with the one coming south from Santa Fé. Although the Rio Grande Valley had been a place where the emigrants enjoyed a brief period of relaxation none appears to have felt regret at leaving it. Caspar Ricks, who had come down the valley from Albuquerque, records that this parting was "a source of general rejoicing to us we had drank of it muddy waters so long that some of the company began to imagine they were getting as full of sand bars as the river itself, we hoped too to bid adieu to the rats and mosquitoes which had been a source of great annoyance to us. . . ."

Although most of the emigrant companies broke up during their stay in the Rio Grande Valley, the smaller fragments usually reassembled into new companies before moving farther west, for the remainder of the route was to have its full share of perils. Ricks, in describing this part of the journey says, "we in conjunction with the Clarkeville company had imployed a Mexican guide who informed us that we would meet with no water for 36 miles but much to our satisfaction we came about noon to an abundant supply of good water, in a reservoir formed in a large rock by nature, it was something like 20 feet in diameter and at least 6 feet deep it was in a ravine at the foot of a high bluff between two mountains and appeared to be a large cistern formed in a solid rock, the day was very warm and our mules very thirsty, there we remained a couple hours letting our teams graze and then moved on—we expected the distance that we would have to go after that before we reached water would be about 20 or 25 miles—so we drove till dark and camped at the foot of a mountain some 10 or 12 miles from this hole of water, in most exelent grass—but not a stick of wood or

a drop of water only what we had brought with us—our road from the river to this water hole was very rough, sandy hilly and immencely gravely—after we passed this place we struck a smooth level road which reminded us very much of the plains we had crossed over before we arrived at Santa Fe.—

"Saturday July 21st [1849] As we had camped the evening previous without wood or water and not knowing how far we would have to travel without it we took a very early start—sunrise found us on our way—going in a due western direction from where we had camped—after a couple hours drive we came to one of the finest springs of water we had met with since we left the country around Santa Fe—it was greatly to our astonishment and here we concluded to spend the day—"

Thirty miles from this place the party came to the Rio Mimbres where they found "a splendid spring, the water cold and perfectedly clear as cristal—"

Gold Mines of Rio Prieto

Before leaving the Rio Grande there was a strong desire on the part of many to make an excursion to the Rio Prieto to prospect for gold. This river was shown upon the Kearny map and had acquired a reputation as a desirable prospecting place for gold seekers through the reference that appeared in Emory's account of the Kearny expedition. "As the story goes," reads the report, "the Priete flows down from the mountains, freighted with gold. Its sands are said to be full of this precious metal. A few adventurers, who ascended the river hunting bever, washed the sands at night, when they halted, and were richly rewarded for their trouble. Tempted by their successes, they made a second trip, and were attacked and most of them killed by the Indians. My authority for

this statement is Londeau, who though an illiterate man, is truthful."

Ricks states that while his party from Little Rock were still on the Rio Grande there was talk of combining with other companies in order to have "a sufficient force to go by the river and examine the sands for the precious metals." Emigrant trains from El Paso also gave careful consideration to this idea of gathering gold while on the way to California, and Captain Murchison, who led one of the first companies of gold seekers from Austin to El Paso, organized a company of men at the latter place for the purpose of exploring the Gila River, having as his object the finding of the gold mines on the Rio Prieto. Since both Murchison's party and the Little Rock Company left the river for these "diggings" about the same day, it is highly probable that the infection was more or less general among the emigrants along the Rio Grande. Cox relates that his company also caught the fever which rose as they moved across the plains to the Rio Mimbres. At this place it was definitely decided to organize an expedition to reconnoitre the region and report to the main body of emigrants at a point farther on the trail. While the plans were being worked out, one of the skeptical members of the company told a glowing tale of a gold deposit he had seen a few miles back along the trail. The story was sufficient to divert the attention of the emigrants from the Rio Prieto and to send them back in search for the gold, which they failed to find. In their disappointment and wrath at being deceived, they abandoned the attempt to seek the Rio Prieto. In spite of the general interest aroused by this report of gold, none of the expeditions appears to have been successful in finding it.

Some of those who sought the Rio Prieto mines continued on down the Gila River by Kearny's Route while others again joined the main trail or Cooke's Route at

the edge of Dry Lake. This trail continued in a southwesterly direction until it came to the intersection with the Janos or southern road near the eastern entrance to Guadalupe Pass. This pass led through the Guadalupe Mountains that form the water shed between the Chihuahua uplands and the streams flowing toward the Pacific; it must not be confused with the Guadalupe Pass leading through the divide at the head of Delaware Creek east of the Rio Grande. Ricks says of the pass, "we were compelled to go down, and did so letting them [the wagons] down by ropes—this was the work of hours as the mountain was long and steep, owing to the roughness of the road we made but little progress to day in our journey—perhaps in all 5 or 6 miles—we camped in the midst of tall mountains, on a small mountain stream, . . ."

Deserted Ranchos

After having crossed the Guadalupe Range the emigrants found themselves in northern Sonora, which is now southeastern Arizona. Raids by the Apaches during recent years had had a disastrous effect upon the region, and many of the old ranchos of Spanish days were deserted and the stock scattered. From the remnants of these herds there were still to be found many wild cattle in this district, and the wild bulls of the Santa Cruz and San Pedro valleys furnished fresh meat for the emigrants on southern trails as did the buffalo herds of the Platte River for the travelers on central trails. Emigrant trains very frequently lay over a day or more in order thus to replenish their larders. Such hunting had its drawbacks, however, for one emigrant relates that a member of his company shot a bull only to find that it belonged to another emigrant train which, although in that vicinity, had not yet been seen by the one who did the killing.

From the pass in the Guadalupe Mountains Cooke's

Route led west and northwest down the San Pedro Valley and across to Tucson, but during 1849 the emigrants made use of a local road leading farther south through the town of Santa Cruz near the head of the Santa Cruz River. Here, as in the San Pedro Valley, Apache raids had caused many of the ranchos to be deserted and from time to time the emigrants passed abandoned places similar to the one described in the following entry in the diary of Judge Ben Hayes, who followed this route in 1849:

"Soon a wide stretch presents the site of a ranche, now ruined and deserted. Our way proceeds, through the bottom, the hillsides covered with timber, until another ranche or castle apparently & some fixtures . . . among a clump of some thirty cotton-woods attract our eye. Here we find a blacksmith's forge &c—the place where charcoal had been burned, some charcoal and all the other arrangements, where, we suppose, the recent emigrants had shod their oxen or mules. (Yesterday opposite our camp was picked a sheet of fine brass wire, probably intended to sift the sand from gold.) The adobe is on top of a high ledge of rock, impregnable along the stream. We saw a peach tree—all that remains of its former cultivation and comfort. Fear of the Indians had driven away the peaceful inhabitants. . . . There are probably many of these ruined ranches through this part of Sonora, desolated by the ruthless Apaches."

Santa Cruz

After turning aside from the Cooke Route, the emigrant found his way leading over a small range into the upper part of Santa Cruz Valley and to the frontier town of Santa Cruz. "The lofty bluffs on either side very picturesque," read the notes in the Hayes diary. "One on the ridge glittering in the sun, with its singularly washed peaks, now like spires, then like the broad front of an

elegant edifice. The dark green of the oak pleasing to the eye. Soon surmounted one or two tall knolls to a ridge giving a view of broad, fertile valley running north. Descending the long descent, a cornfield meets the eye—then a wheatfield. Turning around the base of the ridge, a small stream leads us to other fields and gives a glimpse of the church of Santa Cruz, not far distant. Passing along a line of large cottonwoods, no doubt set out regularly here, from whose short dark trunks the young sprouts profusely grew up, with poles occasionally crossing them as if in the summer, the ground had been fenced in. We entered the walls of the town. Some of us had supposed this was an Indian village, but a horseman passing us a short distance from the town, saluting us in Spanish, indicated that we should meet with the race with whom we had already spent much of our time, and gave some assurance of recruiting our supplies. Several polite Mexicans met us at the walls, and we scattered among the houses on the plaza, each seeking to satisfy his wants. Some were lucky, or quick enough, to get baked bread, eggs, chickens, sugar, dried peaches, beans and molasses. Flour enough was procured, pinole, corn meal, and we might have had corn for our mules. . . . These people inquire a great deal for blankets—we have none to spare. Emigrants could trade well with them here. Flour is $6.00 the fanega—chickens 25 cts. each. A fine article of dried beef was got. No onions. The bean here is very fine. Visited the church, a large long building—its front somewhat defaced. A sort of chapel, with pretty statues of the Savior, San Antonio, Mater Dolorosa, Purissinna Concepcion &c—Here is the fort—saw six carbines, and one small cannon,—About 40 soldiers are stationed here. Some fifteen of them—they are infantry—marched down the road this afternoon towards a neighboring town. A sentinal stands on top of the house—from which the

approach of the dreaded Indians could be seen far off. Lofty hills surmount the town on the east, on which they sometimes can discern the enemy, overlooking their plaza, like the hawk over a brood of chickens. In September, 200 Apaches charged down along the town, in view of the redoubtable fort, drawing off all the loose stock they could find and went off unscathed. A citizen informs me that all their small towns on the frontier are now occupied by 'soldados'—very little appearance, however, of what we are accustomed to call by that name in our country."

The town of Santa Cruz here described was the first settlement the emigrants reached after leaving the Rio Grande at Socorro or at Doña Ana. It was a garrisoned town but, as seen in the quotation just cited, the inhabitants lived in constant fear of the Apaches. The attacks of these Bedouins of the Southwest came swiftly and often, and kept the settlements stripped of live stock, supplies and grain. When at one place the emigrants inquired for milk, Hayes says they were greeted with the reply "No vacca"—"No Mula"—"No cavallo"—"todo a los Apaches." The Apaches had cleaned them out of cows, mules, horses and all. Another old Mexican related in saddened tones that the Apaches a few months before had carried off three of his children.

Throughout all the region south of the Gila from El Paso to Yuma was to be seen far too much evidence of the activities of the Apache Indians. Even while the American emigrants were encamped in large numbers at El Paso in July of 1849 the Apaches made a raid near by and stampeded a drove of mules. The authorities made a standing offer of two hundred dollars each for Apache scalps and two hundred fifty dollars each for prisoners. Many of the Americans turned aside to try their hand at collecting bounty on Apache scalps.

Ruins of Old Missions

The valley of the Santa Cruz River which the emigrants now followed made a very pleasing contrast to the desert country over which they had come. All unite in describing it as beautiful country with good soil and a good supply of timber, although the effects of Apache raids were sadly evident in the deserted ranches along the way.

Passing down the Santa Cruz Valley the emigrants came upon the ruins of a church. This was the old mission of Guebavi founded by Father Eusebio Kino about 1702. It was nearly a mile off the regular route but many of the emigrants took occasion to get a closer view. A long trail of ashes indicated that before its destruction there had been an extensive enclosure.

Fifteen miles brought them to another village in which were the ruins of an even more extensive church. This was Tumacacori Mission. The deserted mission orchards furnished a very welcome supply of fruit to the California emigrants. Here in December, 1849, Hayes found "Some 50 peach trees in an enclosure—the ground in places covered with the seeds—the fruit has fallen and none to gather it. Corrals still standing—not a living thing seen. It had a melancholy appearance. The walls of the church still stand, no roof, and only the upright piece of the cross. It looked desolate indeed. . . . [It was] built of beautiful large burnt brick; the walls inside plastered with cement, the dome over the altar covered with cement which shines white in the sun; portico in front, with 2 tier of columns; Rich & exquisite carving inside, 4 bells, one has been taken down; sweet-toned, probably a chime. This would be an ornament to any of our cities."

The route continued down the Santa Cruz Valley past deserted ranchos until at last the river lost itself in the sand and the road crossed a barren desert country to a

village of Indian huts and adobe houses. Here in contrast to their poor dwellings was a once magnificent church—the old Jesuit mission San Xavier del Bac. Concerning this town and the church Hayes makes these observations: "Struck with the strange appearance of Indian wigwams on one side, and adobes on the other; still more with the splendid church of solid structure, whose dome & belfrys overlook the town and a wide extent of mountain and plain. Staid there till ten o'clock when finally succeeded in getting a sight of the interior. Our first visit was to the church the splendor of the outside, and a glimpse of the beauty of the inside through a high window, exciting our curiosity to the highest. We asked a Mexican to admit us. . . . They kept us waiting half an hour, meantime I examined the other premises. The delay itself seemed to have been made only to astonish & please us, the more. Two belfrys—hexagonal base, then octagonal on it, then smaller dome-shaped, with cross on top of the whole—whole height of the belfry finished perhaps 160 feet. Two bells in the completed belfry—one in the other belfry which seems never to have been completed. Dome back of the belfrys, over the altar. Terrace on top of the whole very pretty. Beautiful front, with niches for figures, some of them now defaced a good deal. High wall on the last, enclosing rooms with lofty ceilings, which may once have been a monastery, staircase view from interior gallery—and two galleries outside—floors solid cement, in square blocks. 3 Altars. Light and airy appearance of ceiling over altar, with white, pink and blue colors. Statues innumerable of saints, Apostles, Blessed Virgin, &c. 12 Oil paintings by masters, sent no doubt from Europe—appear to be old, and to a connoisseur would be of great value. Besides, numerous fine paintings on the walls, some very large, of Scriptural scenes, and the colors fresh as if painted yesterday. Four old missals in a closet in the sacristy,

which the girls, thinking doubtless we would be interested in their treasures, unlocked for us. Oldest printed 1762, another 1769,—Parish record of births &c. Oldest date in the latter 1765. No seats. Side rooms, sacristy &c—all highly finished. Splendid cornice. Gilded carved pilasters, making the altar, in the light of the sun's rays straying through a lofty window, glitter like a grand mass of gold. . . ." This mission had been established by Father Kino in 1700.

About nine miles from San Xavier was the town of Tucson. This was quite a settlement with two blacksmith shops, and a shoe factory employing seven workers. The women were expert in needlework. Here as at San Xavier the emigrants were able to secure a supply of milk as well as grain and flour. There was a scarcity of merchandise in the town, especially dry goods, and those emigrants who had a surplus of such goods made excellent bargains with the natives. The Americans were well received and occasionally a fandango was held in their honor. Here on September 4 Cox and his party met a number of Sonorans returning from the California mines. He records, "their report is encouraging and corroberates the accounts we have previously had—One of these persons brought home about twenty thousand dollars in dust which was exhibited to our Company."

Pima Villages

After leaving Tucson the California route led across the Tucson desert northwesterly and reached the Gila River near the Pima Villages. This was a trying *jornada* of ninety miles and the stock suffered greatly, especially during the dry season. One company from Missouri lost twelve of their oxen on this desert, therefore being forced to abandon four wagons and to discard much of their luggage.

The Pima and Maricopa Indians were friendly but had

to be watched for petty thieving. They offered to trade corn, wheat, vegetables and melons for articles they desired from the emigrants; especially did they want clothing, blankets and ornaments of various sorts. Cox observes that these people had begun to take on a veneer of civilization as the result of this barter with the emigrant trains.

"The California travel," says he, "has effected a great change in the habits and appearance of these Indians. Originally they wore no other covering than a breach clout and I suppose were as happy in their nakedness as Adam and Eve before they had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge—But now how changed—you rarely see one of these Indians who had not on a Shirt, Coat or a pair of Pants —though never an entire suit—I was much diverted at the singularly uncomfortable appearance of one who come into our camp the first day—he was a tall fine looking man, young and well formed—and indeed seemed proud of his proportions—but to his dress—the first object that attracted my attention was the black two story hat which with one hand he ballanced upon his head—next and lastly, he had on a heavy blue blanket Coat all buttoned up to the Chin—this I suppose constituted his wardrobe—for his lower extremities were in a state of entire nudity—the poor fellow looked fit to expire—the persperation poured from his body, and coming down his legs, fell upon the burning sand like a refreshing shower —he seemed to have selected a position favourable to his views and stood with his arms crossed upon his breast in deep thought, apparently taking a Daguerreotype view of our little Camp—now and then however with a slow and mechanical movement he would raise one corner of the Coat and wipe the oily water from his brow—'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' "

These Indians seemed to be proud of their good reputa-

tion with the emigrants and produced numerous papers from earlier emigrant companies. These testimonials were viewed with interest by the later emigrants since they furnished a fairly good record of the passage of earlier trains. Thus Hayes, who passed through the Pima Villages in December, 1849, writes that the papers given him showed that the New York Free Will Company went through on October 27, and had found these Indians "very friendly & accommodating"; Allen Johnson, of Tennessee, recorded on September 10 that he was treated with "much kindness & courtesy"; Everton was there September 21 and put twenty-two oxen to graze in the field of the Pima chief; the Havilate Mining Association, also from New York City, passed through on November 20, 1849. Hayes writes that he found these Indians a "Lively, merry race, apparently very happy, very talkative, and each laughs heartily at everything he says."

Down the Gila

The journey down the Gila River was long and trying. It required from ten to thirty days according to the equipment and condition of the company. Water was not as plentiful as one might expect and the road was heavy with sand. As the travelers made their way they frequently encountered scenes warning them of the ill luck of former emigrants—graves by the roadside, and abandoned wagons. Hayes records:

"Passed more log chains, a wagon broken up, wagon tires—two whole wheels on the axle, iron wedge, crowbar, two good cooking stoves (—what do they need these for?)"

And again three days later he says, "Passed last night fragments of wagons, and two substantial $150 wagons standing in the road, all ox teams, with plates, camp kettles, 5 or 6 lbs of ground coffee neatly put up in papers,

ovens, 6 hoes, one tent, India rubbershoes[.] Our men took such things as they needed, no telling how much else had been left, but appropriated, as they required, by subsequently passing companies."

This part of the journey did not appeal strongly to the emigrants for the sun was hot and the country dry. The entry of Cox in his diary for September 21, 1849, pays respect to the nature of the region and suggests the manner in which one company accommodated their costume to meet the needs of the climate.

"What a Country—I am sure that no sane man will ever travel this route a second time—It is certainly the most disagreeable, uninteresting and monotinous Country under the sun (except always the Pecos). We left camp this morning and have traveled fifteen miles under a scorching sun, and through sand and dust—a foot deep—we camped a mile off the road to give our Horses the benefit of a small patch of Marsh grass—the first that we have seen for sixty miles—The thermometer stands regularly now at two or three hundred—more or less. The 'Shirt Tail Company' bound for California water & grass permitting passed here a few days ago, as we learn from a notice posted beside the road—They have adopted a traveling *uniform*, which considering the weather and state of the road is feasible comfortable & economical—i.e. Hat, Dicky and Spurs—" When he reflected upon these experiences he could not repress the question, "Can the desert possibly be worse than our travel down the Gila?"

Crossing the Colorado

At last the Colorado River was reached. Across it, beyond the desert, lay California! The Harrisburg Company, following the Southern Emigrant Road, arrived at the mouth of the Gila on October 12, 1849, having been on the trail just a little less than six months. There on the

west side of the river they found a company of United States Dragoons under Lieutenant Cave J. Couts. This was a part of the escort of the Boundary Commission who were surveying the line recently established between the United States and Mexico.

In the fall of 1849 the regular crossing of the Colorado was ten miles below the mouth of the Gila. It will be remembered, however, that one of the Harrisburg wagons was prepared for emergencies and when a ferry boat was required, it could soon be changed from a prairie schooner into a scow. Cox says:

"Accordingly we launched our *Boat* the evening of the 12th and the 14th landed ourselves safely on the west side —In the mean time & before we had commenced crossing a party of Mexicans came up, eighteen in number, who we also passed safe over Jordon, for the trifleing remuneration of $60—The Gila and Colorado unite and form a large basin, on the East side of a small Mountain and thence flow directly West—through the Mountain, or between the two Mountains—the passage being about one hundred yards in width—the channel deep and current rapid—A wall of solid rock rises on each side of the Stream, perpendicular to the height of about three hundred feet—from the summit of these peaks is a view both grand and beautiful—three Rivers as it were, starting from your feet, and running in triangular directions, till lost in the distance. Col. Collier, the newly appointed collector at the port of San Francisco with his *escort* of *Dragoons*—and Mr. Auderbon, the *Naturalist*, with a company from New York came up and crossed while we were at this place—Here was the first instance of distress that I had seen on the road—Many of these men had not a days provisions on hand—and some were entirely destitute—Our company afforded them all the releif in their power—"

When Benjamin Hayes and his party reached the crossing of the Colorado on December 31, 1849, they found a ferry conducted by the Mexican officers who were there with the Mexican contingent of the Boundary Commission. Lieutenant Couts had returned to San Diego. The ferry charge was stated at two dollars for each man and the same for each mule. By means of careful diplomacy this was reduced one half for the Hayes company but still fell heavily on the emigrants whose supply of cash was low. Trouble arose later over this Colorado ferry, for in 1850 it came into the possession of a band of lawless Texans. They plundered the emigrant trains and mistreated the Indians, until the latter retaliated by killing the ferry keepers. This led to the establishment in November, 1850, of an army post opposite the mouth of the Gila, known as Fort Yuma.

The Colorado Desert

From the junction of the Gila and Colorado rivers the path of the emigrants led westward across the dreaded Colorado Desert, now transfigured into the beautiful Imperial Valley. The trail passed down the Colorado on its west side about fourteen miles, then turned west into the desert. A journey of fifteen miles over heavy sand brought the emigrants to their first supply of water at Cooke's Wells. Here they found no grass for the stock, but the plant of the mesquite bean furnished a good substitute.

The next water to be had after Cooke's Wells was at Almo Mucho, twenty-seven miles over a sandy ridge. In order to cross this desert Cox says his party left camp at three o'clock in the afternoon and traveled until one. At daybreak they were off again and reached their camping place just after sundown. "Not a tree, a sprig of grass or a living creature to be seen—not an incident to disturb the dull monotony of the scene—throughout the day the

sun shone hot and scorching, glimmering upon the sand, like heat from a furnace, . . ." From Almo Mucho ten miles more travel by good road brought the emigrants to New River, an intermittent stream which was dry except in the rainy season of the year. Kearny and Cooke suffered greatly in 1846 because they found this stream dry and water very scarce. The fall of 1849, however, was the beginning of a wet season and when the goldseekers arrived the stream was already full of water. Because of the relief afforded, the stopping place here was given the name of "Camp Salvation."

The emigrants usually required three days to cross the desert from Cooke's Wells to Camp Salvation. Hayes gives a very complete account of the hardships of this part of the journey. Two days had already been spent upon the desert when they went into camp on January 2, 1850. Hayes says:

"It had been arranged to start when the moon should rise, for the first water for men, & there get breakfast. The Maj. & I made our supper on cold beans & beef which we cooked last night, with all the water in our canteens —made no fire, as the night was not cold. Houston had a cup of coffee, which left them no water. At 11 I awoke, roused the rest—by 12 we were off. Deep sandy road—sometimes, however, pretty firm. Most of us walked all night. I got too sleepy to ride my mule—a perfect stupor, and put Jno. Houston on it. Not very thirsty myself, but the rest wanted water very much—At length we came to a road leading down a steep sand bluff—the water!!—men & mules were nearly all down, and no water found (we since learn there is none now, the surface of the ground in the neighborhood is paved, literally, with the bones of dead animals. Disappointed, we resumed the march, in the hope in 5 miles of supplying our mules, as well as ourselves. Came to the forks of the road—a right hand

fork leads to where the water was, but the first company that passed us used it all up. We did not take the road. Previously we had seen a fire dimly in the distance. We saw it from time to time till daylight—at first supposing it to be not more than 2 or 3 miles off. Mile after mile convinced us that we should find no water short of Camp Salvation. Just before daybreak we came to the forks of road—and, welcome sight!—to grass. J. Houston went on to examine the left hand in the direction of the fire, while we made a fire to warm by (The night had been rather cold—) and grazed the mules. When day was fairly broke, he not returning, we concluded to follow him, and in four or five miles, encamped on the slough, or New river."

Camp Salvation

"Friday, 4th," continues Hayes, ". . . . We spend the day at Camp Salvation—the air is warm, notwithstanding the rain. The rain has ceased at 3 o'clock, and there is a prospect of its clearing off. Paid a visit to a small company we find encamped here with wagons and oxen. They are a part of the Frémont Association, of the city of New York, originally consisting of 50 men, of whom only about 20 are now on the road for California, the rest having become discouraged by the difficulties & delays of the road. The Association left New York nine months ago yesterday—started from Galveston, by San Antonio & El Paso, following the army & engineers engaged in opening the road. They left Cooke's road near Ben Moore mountain for Tueson, with a Mexican guide. They think they thus saved about 100 miles, but passed over a rather mountainous country, finding plenty of grass & water in water holes chiefly, made by the rains, Plenty of grass & water (of the same kind) on the Texas route. They passed over long stretches where they would have suffered for

water, but for rains. On the Tueson route—the cut-off—Mess No. 1 had all their oxen stolen one night by the Apaches. . . . They are a merry, contented set. All of the above were from the city of New York, except Marshall, who is from La Grange, Texas."

Warner's Ranch

The journey of the emigrant of 1849 after leaving Camp Salvation can best be told in the words of the diary of Cornelius Cox so frequently referred to in this chapter. His entry of December 23, 1849, states:

"We again 'struck' our tents about 4 O. C. in the evening and traveled until Midnight—making eighteen miles—from New River thus far the road was good—At 7 O. C. in the morning Oct. 24th we resumed our March and reached Carrisso Creek about 3 P. M. the greater part of this road this day was very heavy—distance from the Lagoon to Carrisso Creek twenty eight miles—from Carisso Creek to Valicatas [Vallecita] it is twenty miles & the worst part of the road across the desert, deep sand the entire distance—this last stretch severely tried the mettle of our Animals—but—they nobly stood the test—and with heads erect—and nostrils free, they shook from their feet the last sand of that dread Jornada.

"26th. Left Valicitas in the evening and traveled five miles—27th. fifteen miles—which brought us to San Phillipe [Felipe], an Indian Village.

"28th. Arrived at Warners Ranche, and finding good grass, lay by one day. The road here forks—one leading to San Deigo, the other to Los Angeles. Warner has established a grocery & Butchery for the *accommodation* of the emigrants—and this being the first place at which supplys can be obtained, the emigrant has been subjected to the severest extortion, it being the motto of this semi-savage to 'size the pile' of all who come along. At this

place we regaled ourselves upon Peaches and grapes of the most delicious quality—They were raised by an old San Phillipe Indian by the name of Lorenzo, he is clever and intelligent man and speaks the Spanish language fluently. It is ninety miles from Warners ranch to 'Rancho Chino'—or the ranch of Col Williams—at which place we arrived November 6th. The Country intermediate is mountainous and generally poor—yet in the valleys which alternate every ten or fifteen miles, there is usually a ranch and considerable stock, but little or no attention is paid to the cultivation of the soil—The road is excelent and the Country well watered, but in many places destitute of grass— . . . We left the beautiful valley of 'Rancho Chino' on the 14th Nov and arrived at Los Angeles on the 18th, distance thirty miles—The country intermediate is rich and picturesque—We passed several ranches, some owned by Americans—Very little attention is paid to agriculture—Stock raising appears to be the main, if not the only *business* of the Country, and indeed this part of the State is admirably adapted to that purpose—Oats and Clover grow spontaniously and attain the greatest perfection. The grass is also of a superior quality—The cattle & Horses, 'roaming upon a thousand hills' are now fat and sleek—The horses here are larger & every way superior to the native stock of Texas—The Pueblo de Los Angeles is quite a pretty place, and but for the state of Society would I think to be a very pleasant place to live—The Mexican honors gambling as a profession—and owing to its strange facination, the plentitude of money in the Country, as well as their naturally indolent disposition —*that business* seems general and almost exclusive of all other at this time, and I am sorry to add that *Americans* no less than Mexicans are engaged in this low vice—The Los Angeles valley is rich, healthy and pleasant at all seasons of the year—and adapted to the growth of almost

everything belonging to the vegetable kingdom—The grape is extensively cultivated, and fruit of every variety are found here. Situated within twenty five miles of the Pacific Coast, in the heart of a rich Country and possessing a salubrious climate, Los Angeles may well look forward to a prosperous future."

From Los Angeles the gold seekers had the choice of three routes, one by sea and two by land. The shorter route led across the Tehachapi mountains and through the San Joaquin Valley. It was over a country having little or no population, whereas the longer or coast route offered a more pleasant climate for traveling together with the opportunity to obtain supplies at frequent towns. Cox chose the coast route. The diary continues:

"Camped the evening of the 10th at the Mission of San Beneventura which is situated immediately on the Coast, and now the long wished for pleasure of beholding the Pacific was gratified, and I truly felt that I had reached the *jumping off place*. From San Beneventura our road followed the Beach fifteen miles the Mountains approximating almost to the waters edge—fifteen miles farther brought us to the Port of Sante Barbary [Santa Barbara], a beautiful place, containing about one thousand inhabitants. At this place I attended a Fandango, and was surprised and delighted at the *beauty & fashion* that filled the room—I do not believe there is a village in the *States* that can produce among the same number of girls—more beauty, modesty, and grace than the town of Santa Barbary —Santa Barbary has not the natural facilities for a place of much business, or sufficient back Country to support a large town, but it affords many inducements as a place of residence."

From Santa Barbara the remnant of the Cox or Harrisburg party followed on up the coast route reaching

Monterey on January 10, and ten days later were at San José, "a very pretty inland town and situated in the heart of a rich and beautiful Country. As an agricultural district, it is superior to any part of the State that we have passed through." Cox then made his way at last to San Francisco, the "Mushroom City, and left beleiving it to be the most extravegant place in the known world."

Chapter X

CHAPTER X

The Death Valley Trail

IN PRECEDING chapters attention has been given to the Platte-Humboldt Trail and the southern emigrant routes. There remains for consideration, however, the Salt Lake-Los Angeles Trail which in 1849 attained undeserved notoriety through the experiences of some who attempted to follow it.

The route from Salt Lake to Southern California was in fact, as shown in Doctor Cleland's *Pathfinders*, the first of the California overland routes to be discovered by Americans. Jedediah Strong Smith, in the fall of 1826, struck out southwesterly from Ashley's Post on Utah Lake and reached San Gabriel Mission, near the pueblo of Los Angeles, in the latter part of that year. The following year he made a second journey over this route, which within a decade became part of a regularly used caravan trail from Santa Fé under the misleading name of "Old Spanish Trail." When Frémont returned east from his first visit to California in 1844 he traveled along this caravan route from a point near Cajon Pass to the vicinity of Salt Lake.

Through such journeys as these the trail leading from the Great Basin to Southern California became fairly well known before the events of 1849. A number of Mormon

parties used it in their return from California to Salt Lake after the discharge of the members of the Mormon Battalion at the close of the Mexican War.

The Humboldt River Trail was known to be the most direct route from the Great Salt Lake region to the gold district, and therefore the trail to Los Angeles offered no great inducement to the emigrants of 'Forty-nine to turn aside from the beaten road, except in the case of slow travelers who reached South Pass late in the season and were confronted with the grave danger of being caught in the snows of the Sierra Nevada as the Donner party had been a few years earlier. Those who did not want to spend the winter among the Mormons at Salt Lake found the deflection to the south a happy solution. The Los Angeles Trail was not beset with snows and the more southerly latitude, as the journey advanced, would give added assurance against the hardships of winter. A considerable number of late comers therefore gathered in the Salt Lake region during the fall of 1849, waiting for cooler weather and rains to make conditions more pleasant for the journey southwest across the desert.

The Los Angeles Trail from Salt Lake was not a well worn road. In fact, the emigrants who undertook to follow it were not sure that it had ever been used by wagons, although pack trains had frequently traversed the route. There was talk at Salt Lake of other routes to the mines much shorter than by Los Angeles. One man there, named Williams, was especially insistent that five hundred miles could be saved by following a short cut; furthermore, he produced a map showing clearly the new route, which was said to run west directly to the gold region. The possibility of saving so much distance and time was not to be overlooked and many were induced to think favorably of taking the "Williams' Short Route," but in the absence of an experienced guide no one was eager to venture it.

The Experience of Judge Van Dyke

Among the emigrant trains at Salt Lake City was a company of gold seekers from Cleveland, Ohio, who had arrived there on October 8, 1849. Having learned that there was grave doubt of being able to cross the Sierra Nevada before the passes were blocked with snow, they decided to proceed to California by the southern route and engaged Mr. Jefferson Hunt as pilot. Mr. Hunt was a Mormon leader and, already attracted by the soil and climate of California, was planning a Mormon settlement in the San Bernardino Valley. Judge Walter Van Dyke gives a careful account of this journey:

"We left Salt Lake the 3d of November, 1849, pursuing a southerly and southwesterly direction along the foot of the Wasatch mountains. The route is through a series of fertile valleys to the point where the trail crosses the southern rim of the great Utah basin.

"The first and largest valley south of Salt Lake is the Utah valley. At the southern end of Utah Lake we struck the old Spanish trail, the northern route traveled by the Spaniards between the pueblo of Los Angeles and Santa Fe. A number of fine streams put down from this range of mountains, flowing into the desert, timbered along their banks, the largest being the Spanish Fork and Sevier river. Where the range turns westerly there is a low depression called the Mountain Meadows. It was a famous camping place on the line of the old Spanish trail. The camp ground is near a spring at the foot of the mountain on the west side of the valley or meadow, with timber on the slope of the mountain. The night we camped there, it commenced snowing and we were obliged to corral the cattle and other stock and guard them; and build fires of the dry cedar hauled down from the side of the mountain to keep ourselves warm. The storm continued the next day with

considerable violence and the stock were guarded to prevent them from straying off. Owing to the snow there was no chance for feed here, so we were obliged to move on without delay. . . . Soon after we commenced descending the southern slope of the divide the weather became warmer and from that on we had no difficulty as far as the climate was concerned.

"We reached the Santa Clara, a tributary of the Rio Virgin, December the 11th. The Virgin river is a considerable stream coming down from the Wasatch range of mountains that we had crossed and flows southeasterly into the Colorado. Along the Santa Clara and Rio Virgin we found considerable feed; but being without so long already, the stock were nearly starving; and many cattle gave out and were left along the road. I noticed on these river bottoms cornstalks and some squash or pumpkins still remaining on the ground, and also indications of irrigation, the work of Indians, of course, as no white people were then in this region of country. These Indians are the Piutes, described by Fremont in his report of explorations of 1843-4 as causing him considerable trouble on his return by this same route. They are a marauding and savage tribe of Indians and seek every opportunity to waylay and massacre small parties or stragglers from larger ones. Our company was so large, however, that we were not troubled with them except in the stealing and killing of stock that wandered from camp.

"Las Vegas, further on this way, is another famous camping ground. It is a large meadow with several springs at the head uniting which form quite a stream flowing through it. One of these springs is so large as to make a good bathing pool, and the water is warm and boils up with such force as to buoy the swimmer like a cork. . . ."

Across the Desert

"So many of the cattle had died or been abandoned that the remainder were not able to move the trains except very slowly; and in consequence we had already exceeded the time anticipated in getting into the settlements and our provisions were nearly exhausted. It was proposed, therefore, that someone should go on ahead and send back some relief, and about a dozen of us volunteered for that purpose. We reached the Mojave river the second day after leaving the camp at a point not far below Barstow as near as I can judge. We continued along the same old Spanish trail that we had been following up that river and across to the northern entrance of the Cajon Pass, where we arrived quite late the last day of January. Our provisions being exhausted and, there being a moon, we concluded to venture through the pass that night instead of remaining over till morning. From my notes I quote: 'I shall never forget this nights adventure in this wild mountain pass. We issued from the pass into the valley about four o'clock the morning of February 1st. We halted at the mouth of the canyon until daylight and then renewed our walk. If we hadn't been in a famishing and exhausted condition we might have appreciated with pleasure the striking and agreeable change in the country. Even yesterday we were traveling in a dry and barren desert; to-day, we are treading on beds of beautiful flowers and wild clover, and the morning breeze is laden with their perfume.'

"We reached the Cucamonga Rancho about ten o'clock, February the 1st. We found an American family here and were supplied with an abundance including milk and butter, a rare treat indeed, and a great change in the fare we had been accustomed to during the many months of our trip. A few days later we passed over to the Chino

ranch, better known among the immigrants of that period as William's Ranch. Colonel Williams, the owner, had, during that season sent out many parties for the relief of the immigrants. The next morning Colonel Williams furnished me a horse and a guide to come into Los Angeles, as I had some letters and packages to deliver to parties here. On the way we stopped at Rowland's on the Puente where we were treated in the same hospitable manner characteristic of all the large ranch owners here.

"In a week or ten days the other members of our Cleveland party came in with the train and we had thus crossed the continent. We had consumed eight months on the trip, much longer than was anticipated when starting, still all arrived well and no one had been seriously sick on the way, though subjected to many hardships. This could not be said in regard to most of the overland companies of that year."

The experiences of the party of which Judge Van Dyke was a member may be considered typical for those who essayed to reach California by this route. All was not pleasant traveling and the emigrants often suffered from want of water and food for their stock, but it was much better than attempting to overcome the obstacles and dangers of a winter's passage over the Sierra Nevada.

The Sand Walking Company

The party responsible for the application of the name "Death Valley" was one that did not keep to the main trail to Los Angeles, but sought an easier journey by taking the shorter route suggested by Williams' map. As frequently happened in such cases, this "cut-off" was the undoing of the party and resulted in the death of several of its members. The group was made up of various elements which seem to have united in an organized company while gathered near Salt Lake. Among the members

were Mr. Asabel Bennett and his friend, Mr. Arcane, who were journeying to California with their families; there was also a group of frolicsome young fellows from Illinois who called themselves the "Jayhawkers," and traveling with them at times were others, including the Reverend J. W. Brier with his wife and children. Probably most important of all in the history of the expedition was William Lewis Manly, who has related the experiences of the trip in his *Death Valley in '49*. Manly was a friend of Bennett but by force of circumstances had been unable to join him at the Missouri River and had consequently attached himself to another group in order to get across the plains. At the Green River Crossing, Manly and several companions undertook to use an abandoned ferry boat as a water craft in which to seek the Pacific Ocean by floating down the waters of Green River. After many thrilling adventures following the river through the mountains of eastern Utah, they heeded the warning of Indians that further navigation of the river would be perilous and turned toward the Mormon settlement at Salt Lake, on foot. Sharing these experiences with Manly was John Rogers. In the emigrant camps near Salt Lake, Manly accidentally met his friend Bennett, and he and Rogers thereupon proceeded to California with the Bennett company.

The various emigrant bands at the lake united in a large company taking the name of "The Sand Walking Company" with full quota of officers and rules. As leader or pilot, they selected a Mr. J. Hunt (who, like Jefferson Hunt, the leader of Van Dyke's party, was a Mormon elder). Each wagon was to pay him the sum of ten dollars for his service as pilot. As finally organized, the company consisted of one hundred and seven wagons and a big drove of horses and cattle which in all made about five hundred head of stock.

The Company Disrupted

The Sand Walking Company left the Salt Lake settlements in October, 1849, and proceeded without any unusual incidents until about November 1st, when as they approached the rim of the basin near the head of Virgin River they were overtaken by another train commanded by a Captain Smith. This company had a copy of the map made by Williams, ardent advocate of a shorter route.

"This map," says Manly, "was quite frequently exhibited and the matter freely discussed in camp, indeed speeches were made in the interest of the cut-off route which was to be so much shorter. . . . The more the matter was talked about, the more there were who were converted to the belief that the short road would be the best. The map showed every camp on the road and showed where there was water and grass, and as to obstacles to the wagons it was thought they could easily be overcome. A general meeting was called for better consideration of the question.

"A great many were anxious to get the opinion of Capt. Hunt on the feasibility of the new route for he was a mountain man and could probably give us some good advice. He finally consented to talk of it, and said he really knew no more than the others about this particular route, but he very much doubted if a white man ever went over it, and that he did not consider it at all safe for those who had wives and children in their company to take the unknown road. Young men who had no family could possibly get through, and save time even if the road was not as good as Los Angeles road. But said he 'If you decide to follow Smith, I will go with you, even if the road leads to Hell.' . . .

"It was really a serious moment when the front of the train reached the Smith trail. Team after team turned to

the right while now and then one would keep straight ahead as was at first intended. Capt. Hunt came over to the larger party after the division was made, and wished them all a hearty farewell and a pleasant happy journey."

The secessionists had not gone far before it became evident that all was not right. Many cautious ones turned back to rejoin the Hunt company; the Jayhawkers and the Bennett group, however, kept on. Not satisfied that the northwesterly route showed by Williams' map was a proper one, in view of the forbidding nature of the country ahead, Manly took upon himself the occupation of scout and directed the course more nearly west where he espied far across the barren landscape a snow-capped mountain. Travel became increasingly difficult as the oxen began to show the effects of heavy work and insufficient food, and all surplus supplies and equipment were discarded to ease the load as they pushed resolutely on toward the distant peak.

Distress and Despair

Members of the party were often ready to give up the struggle in despair. Manly thus describes the camp to which he returned one evening after a search for water:

"Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Arcane were in heartrending distress. The four children were crying for water but there was not a drop to give them, and none could be reached before sometime next day. The mothers were nearly crazy, for they expected the children would choke with thirst and die in their arms, and would rather perish themselves than suffer the agony of seeing their little ones gasp and slowly die. . . . There was great gladness when John Rogers and I appeared in the camp and gave the mothers full canteens of water for themselves and little ones, and there was tears of joy and thankfulness upon their cheeks as they blessed us over and over again."

In spite of such hardships the weary travelers pushed onward. From time to time they came upon the tracks of the Jayhawkers who with lighter equipment were making better time, although they also were encountering great hardships, having been five days at a time without water and being saved only by a fall of snow. They, too, had sighted the far-off peak and what appeared to be a mountain pass near it.

After several weeks of travel, the Jayhawkers came upon a dry river (later known as Armagosa River), and turning west down a cañon, came to a low-lying utterly barren valley, since famous as "Death Valley." A melancholy spirit pervaded the camp that had been full of hope and fire back on the banks of the Platte. One fellow expressed the feelings of the others when he said that he was sure this was "the Creator's dumping place where he had left the worthless dregs after making a world, and the devil had scraped these together a little."

In this desolate spot, at Christmastide in 1849, Manly overtook the Jayhawkers who had just decided to abandon their wagons and seek escape from the dreadful valley by turning north around the towering barrier of mountains to the immediate west.

Manly's party chose to turn south down the valley, for it seemed to them that a way would be found in that direction. They soon saw, however, that they would have to cross the valley, which to their surprise they found covered with rocks of solid salt. At a fresh water spring, subsequently known as "Bennett's Wells," a council was held. It was necessary that some drastic action be taken or all would perish from thirst or starvation. At this juncture four of the men who had been driving teams for Bennett and Arcane decided to strike out for themselves, were given what provisions they could carry, and departed. The remaining members of the party attempted to cross

the mountains but failed and returned to the spring. In desperation it was decided that they should remain at that place and send the two youngest men of the company, Lewis Manly and John Rogers, for supplies and help.

The Relief Party

In accordance with this plan, oxen were killed and as many supplies as could be spared were given to the young men. All the available money, thirty dollars, was collected and given into their custody and amid tears and prayerful good-byes, Manly and Rogers set out on their perilous journey.

Space does not here permit a full record of their heroic search for aid. They crossed the rugged Panamint Mountains to the west, from which they looked out upon a "grand but worthless landscape." Descending into a valley and crossing another smaller range they again intercepted the trail of the Jayhawkers, which they followed. A dead body on the trail, that of one of the men who had started out ahead of them, gave mute warning that the odds were greatly against them. They pushed on toward the Sierra which loomed high above them, and finally overtook the Jayhawkers in camp. Here they secured a little of the meat of an exhausted ox that had just been butchered. Continuing along an apparently well used trail which has since been identified as the one leading through Walker's Pass, near which they were, they soon overtook the teamsters who had left the valley camp ahead of them, and divided with these now famishing men their small supply of food.

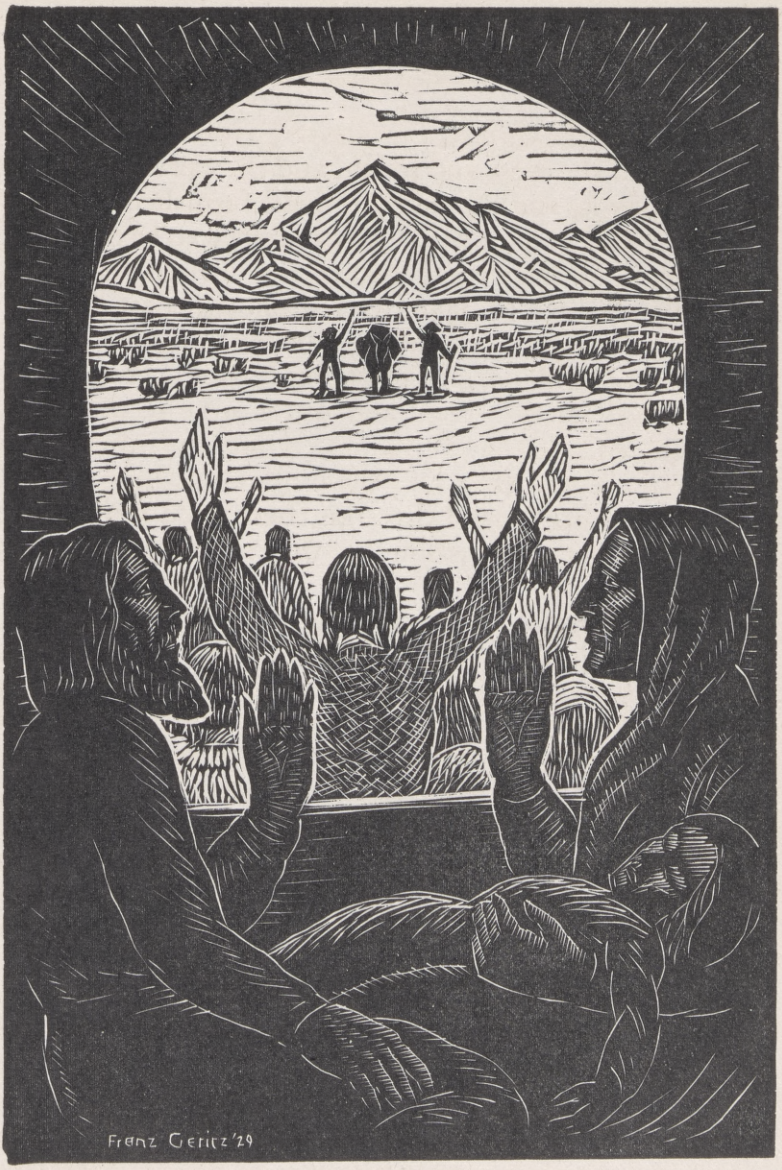
The two messengers had by this time been absent from the famine camp for a week and were beginning to wonder if they could really succeed in their undertaking. They

were still in the desert, but snow-covered mountains beckoned to the west and south, and they pressed on. A crow, a hawk, and a mountain quail furnished the first meat they had had for days. These seemed to be omens of better luck, for they soon reached and crossed the sierra which divided the Mojave Desert from the coast valleys, and were presently descending San Francisquito Cañon where they found indications of civilization. At last they had reached safety! Food and water were secured at a ranch near Mission San Fernando. If only the others were safe, too! Would they find them alive on their return? These thoughts passed through their tired minds, yet there was never a suggestion that they should not attempt to return.

Succor at Last

At the rancho they obtained supplies and two horses and a mule upon which to carry them, which exhausted their fund of thirty dollars. With this meagre outfit, Manly and Rogers again faced the desert. Knowing the trail and possible watering places, they proceeded more surely and made better time on the return trip. The horses failed rapidly under the strain, and at a difficult passage in the mountains had to be left behind; but the little mule proved equal to any situation.

At length they approached the spring where their companions had been left twenty-six days before. They passed the dead body of one of the party, Captain Culverwell, lying face upward in the desert sand. Were the others likewise dead? They would soon know. Presently they came in sight of the empty wagons, stripped of their covers. No cattle were to be seen. Fearing that hostile Indians might have killed their companions and might be lying in wait for their approach, they moved forward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cautiously. It was suggested that Manly fire a shot, which he did, while both stood prepared for any result which might ensue. The suspense was keen. Manly thus records the scene:

"Still as death and not a move for a moment, and then as if by magic a man came out from under a wagon and stood up and threw his arms high over his head and shouted 'The Boys have come! The Boys have come!' Then other bare heads appeared, and Mr. Bennett and wife and Mr. Arcane came toward us as fast as ever they could. The great suspense was over and our hearts were first in our mouths, and then the blood all went away and left us almost fainting as we stood and tried to step. . . . It was some time before they could talk without weeping. Hope almost died within them, and now when the first bright ray came it almost turned reason from its throne."

The party to which Manly and Rogers returned was much smaller than the one they had left, for many members had despaired of help and had decided to attempt to get out safely by themselves. Among the last to go was Captain Culverwell whose body they had seen a short distance from camp. Only the families of Bennett and Arcane remained in camp.

Plans were then made for the outward journey. Since it was out of the question to take the wagons, the wagon covers were used to make saddles for the oxen so that the children and women could ride. About the first of February, 1850, the little party finally began its march, which under the guidance of Manly and Rogers was made without further mishap.

From the top of the Panamint Mountains they gazed on the great Mojave Desert below and beyond them and pondered carefully the words of Manly as he detailed the route they must follow. Their interest was in the country

ahead, not that behind, but Manly notes that they took off their hats and "overlooking the scene of so much trial, suffering and death, spoke the thought uppermost, saying: 'Goodbye Death Valley!' then faced away and made our steps toward camp. Ever after this in speaking of this long and narrow valley over which we had crossed into its nearly central part and on the edge of which the lone camp was made, for so many days, it was called Death Valley."

Chapter XI

CHAPTER XI

Lights and Shadows of the Overland Journey

IN A PREVIOUS chapter consideration has been given to the overland company with especial attention to its organization as a civil unit. This story may fittingly be brought to a conclusion with a summary account of life and incidents of the march. The great movement of people to the new Land of Hope set in motion demands for improved means of transportation which did not reach fulfillment until decades later, and so do not come within the story now in hand other than for brief mention. If one may judge from items in the public press, elaborate facilities were considered to supplement the pack mule and the prairie schooner. Senator Benton urged the building of a government road along the central westward route, to be part railway and part turnpike. Congress was asked to establish a mail line along the same route, which might help to finance an overland stage. There was put into operation in 1849 the "Pioneer Line" of coaches which were advertised to carry passengers from the Missouri River to the California mines in from seventy to one hundred days at a price of two hundred dollars. The first of these coaches passed Fort Kearney on June 8, 1849, having spent a month in covering the first three hundred miles of the journey. The

coaches and baggage wagons were too heavily loaded for the teams to pull them rapidly over the rough roads. The second train passed the same point on July 11, cutting the time to that place to fourteen days. The enterprise was not a success. Delano records that while in the vicinity of Soda Springs his camp was visited by a man traveling on foot carrying his blankets and supplies. The Pioneer Line had failed to reach South Pass and the pedestrian, one of the disappointed passengers, was doing his best to complete the journey to the gold region.

Aerial Steamboat

In Sherwood's *Pocket Guide to California*, published in New York City during the gold rush of 1849, appeared the announcement that Mr. Rufus Porter had practically completed work on his Aerial Steamboat. Mr. Porter was altogether serious in this undertaking, and was sure of the success of his craft. He announced that as soon as a few features had been perfected, he would be ready to carry passengers to California for the sum of one hundred dollars, including board and return passage. The newspapers of the day gave publicity to this announcement, as may be seen from the following item from the *Cincinnati Daily Atlas* in March, 1849:

"There are advertisements out in N. Y. for an 'aerial voyage to California,' to go in two days if the winds are fair and in five days otherwise. 'Nonsense! It is humbug!' says everyone. Very well, Be it so, But we live in an age in which every idea, which does not propose to overcome the laws of God and nature should be examined a little, to see if, after all, it may not be possible."

Then follows a long article on the question whether balloons can be made to change their direction by power from within and prophesying an aerial trip to California some day. It is hardly necessary to state that the first

"aerial voyage" to California took place long after the emigration of 1849.

Strange Caravans

A correspondent of the *Missouri Republican*, writing from Fort Kearney under date of June 23, 1849, reports that the great California caravan had at length swept by that point. The number of wagons that had passed the fort, including those that followed up the north bank of the river, was 5,516. He then adds, "Many are scantily supplied with provisions, and any little detention, which will throw them behind their time, will bring famine upon them. There is one thing, however, in favor of emigration, which will be of vast advantage. The grass is better this season than it has been for years. The heavy rains, although they have made the roads bad, have made most ample amends in pushing forward an unusual amount of growing grass. Had some of the sawmills, blacksmith shops, gold diggers, grind stones, and gold workers been left at home and lighter wagons provided, a larger number would have made much better progress than they are now making."

In contrast to these elaborately equipped caravans, men were occasionally seen making their way westward on foot, carrying their possessions on their backs or in wheelbarrows or push carts. A correspondent writing from Fort Kearney in May, 1849, records this item:

"One man, with a savage looking bull dog and a long rifle over his shoulder, has walked, alone, all the way from Maine. His baggage is a small bundle the size of your hat."

Another tells of a Scotchman, who passed along trundling a wheelbarrow. When asked why he did not join with one of the emigrant trains his reply was: "Na, na, mun, I ken ye'll all brak doon in the mountains, sa I'll

gang along mysel'." He was thirty-five years old and showed no signs of fatigue.

Major Stansbury has set down the following unforgettable picture from the trail in 1849:

"We passed an old Dutchman, with an immense wagon, drawn by six yoke of cattle, and loaded with household furniture. Behind followed a covered cart containing the wife driving herself and a host of babies—the whole bound to the land of promise, of the distance to which, however, they seemed to have not the remotest idea. To the tail of the cart was attached a large chicken coop, full of fowls; two milch cows followed, and next came an old mare, upon the back of which perched a little brown faced bare-footed girl, not more than seven years old, while a small suckling colt brought up the rear."

As may be gathered from the accounts presented in previous chapters, the usual mode of travel was in groups or trains rather than as individuals and most of the emigrants transported their possessions in large wagons, built especially for this use and known as "Prairie Schooners," drawn by oxen, mules or horses. The wagons often had names painted on them as described by Delano:

"It is curious to see the quaint names and devices on some of the wagons: The 'Lone Star,' would be seen rising over a hill; the 'Live Hoosier' rolled along; the 'Wild Yankee,' the 'Rough and Ready,' the 'Enterprise,' the 'Dowdle Family,' were moving with slow and steady pace, with a 'right smart sprinkle' of 'Elephants,' 'Buffaloes' and 'Gold Hunters,' painted on the canvass of the wagons, together with many other quite amusing devices."

In each company were persons who traveled on horseback or on foot driving the ox teams or herding the loose stock that helped make up the cavalcade.

Daily Routine

The activities of the day were soon reduced to routine and every member of the company, even the oxen, knew almost exactly what the next movement was to be.

"Having organized," says L. W. Hastings, "they commence their onward, westward march, under the direction of their officers, and moving merrily on, they soon arrive at their mid-day encampment, when the wagons are driven up, so as to form a large elliptical inclosure, into which the horses may be driven, in case of an incursion, or an attack by the Indians. . . . The cattle and horses, are now turned loose, upon the plains, where they are guarded and herded, by a guard, consisting of several persons, who are designated for that purpose; and who remain upon the plains, beyond the herds, until all have dined, and until the command is given to prepare to march, when they, immediately commence to drive the herds from all directions, toward the camp. Each now proceeds to catch, harness and saddle his horses, and yoke his oxen; and soon the caravan is again in motion; and moving onward, with increased speed, it arrives, in a few hours, at the nocturnal encampment. At this encampment, as at the former, the wagons are again divided, into two equal divisions, which now move, side by side, following their respective officers, until they arrive at the place designated, as the encampment. Here one of the officers, followed by his division, falls off to the right, and the other, to the left, forming right angles; and moving in opposite directions, to designated points, when the former division wheels to the left, and the latter, to the right, forming right angles, as before; when moving on, to another designated point, the former division again wheels to the left, and the latter to the right, forming right angles, and continuing in the same direction, until the two divisions,

meet, and thus form a large square 'caral' or inclosure. Horses are now unharnessed; cattle are unyoked, and all are turned together, upon the unbounded plains, where they are permitted to graze, under the watchful care of a vigilant guard, until nightfall; when after all have supped, and the cloths are removed, the command is given, and the vast herds are crowded together, into the inclosure, before described; which is, now, everywhere surrounded, with erected tents and blazing fires. Within this 'caral' or inclosure, stakes are thickly driven, to which horses and mules, are firmly tied; when sufficient guards are sent out and stationed, at designated posts, where they remain for about two hours; when they are relieved by others, who, after the lapse of two hours, are also relieved, in a similar manner, and so on, during the night. In the morning, upon the signal's being given, other guards are sent into the plains, in the vicinity of the camp, in order to receive and guard the horses and mules, as they are turned out of the 'caral,' and until the command is given to march, when the tumultuous caravan is again in motion, amid the deafening confusion of the loquacious, noisy thousands.

"Nothing different from the foregoing, worthy of remark, occurs, from day to day, in reference to the method of traveling, until the company arrives, in the territory of the hostile Indians, which commences at the Kansas river, and extends throughout the residue of the journey. . . . Should the guards discover an approaching enemy, the safest course is, to throw the caravan, at once, into a defensive attitude, which is very readily done, by forming a 'caral,' in a manner, quite similar to that first described; the only difference being, that the teams of both cattle and horses, occupy the interior, instead of the exterior, of the 'caral,' without being detached from the wagons. Being thus formed, the entire caravan assumes

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an impregnable attitude; the wagons affording complete protection to the women and children, as well as the teams, and at the same time, affording a secure breastwork for the men, should they be driven to the necessity of using them for that purpose."

The experiences of those who made the Great Trek were very different from those of travelers in Pullman cars or modern automobiles. Overland travel, especially across the arid region, at no time is entirely pleasant, but the discomforts of the present day are insignificant compared with those that attended the covered-wagon period. Mrs. Helen M. Carpenter, a bride of a few months, confided to her diary some opinions and observations on these matters which give an excellent picture of the times from a woman's point of view. Quoting her record, we find this picture of one camp:

"The only water was three quarters of a mile from Camp (could get no closer) as there was nothing but a puddle it served the cattle only. Father has a fire in the little sheet iron heating stove in the tent. The baby is crying with the cholic & mother is vainly endeavoring to make her comfortable. This isn't very home like—we will have to go to bed to keep warm."

When the company passed a military post Mrs. Carpenter attempted to make purchases of articles the need of which she had not anticipated. Her trousseau was incomplete for the unexpectedly cold and rainy weather. The store, she says, contained but little in the way of ladies' goods—the best she could do was to buy some brown and black checkered pants cloth to make a jacket. She then tells of the difficulties of dressmaking *en route*.

"I had no pattern to cut by, but as I am used to cutting, I blocked it out & Mother helped in the fitting. It has been too cold for sewing & the road has been so rough and uneven that I accomplished but little with the needle

—if it were not for the dire necessity, would give it up as a bad job."

A little later there appears the following entry which adds another intimate glimpse into the life of the trail:

"The Inmans have been with us for ten days, yet we did not know there was a grandmother in the party until today after the wagons emptied, when she was seen sitting in a rocking chair looking out of the back of the wagon. In answer to inquiries she said that she was large & feeble and could not get out & in without help, so she just stayed in the wagon. Think of that, & we who can wait on ourselves & get out & in at pleasure, have thought we were *so uncomfortable* & *complained* so *much*.

"The foregoing does not sound as though we were sociable or on good terms with our fellow travelers—the plain fact of the matter is that we have *no time* for *sociability*. From the time we get up in the morning, until we are on the road, it is hurry scurry to get breakfasts, & put away the things that necessarily had to be pulled out last night—while under way there is no room in the wagon for a visitor, nooning is barely long enough to eat a cold bite—& at night the cooking utensils & provisions are to be gotten about the camp fire, & cooking enough done to last until the next night.

"Although there is not much to cook, the difficulty & inconvenience in doing it, amounts to a good deal—so by the time one has squatted around the fire & cooked bread & bacon, & made several dozen trips to & from the wagon, washed the dishes (with no place to drain them) & gotten things ready for an early breakfast, some of the others already have their night caps on—at any rate it is time to go to bed. In respect to women's work the days are all very much the same—except when we stop for a day then there is washing to be done & all kinds of odd jobs. Some women have very little help about the camp,

being obliged to get wood & water (as far as possible) make camp fires, unpack at night & pack up in the morning—and if they are Missourians have the milking to do, if they are fortunate enough to have cows. I am lucky, in having a Yankee for a husband."

Notwithstanding the reference in the preceding paragraph to the lack of opportunity for social intercourse, there were times when the emigrants gathered around the evening camp fire and enjoyed a brief period of sociability. Many had brought musical instruments with them and frequently an impromptu dance took place. Kirkpatrick is one of many who describe such scenes. He writes:

"After supper we visited some of the boys of the Pike Co. train. They had a good fiddle with them and so had we and having room enough we concluded to have a country 'Hoe Down' & we did, & such kicking up of dust and swinging of partners I guess never was seen in these mountains before. Danced until nearly 11 P.M. and then the ball broke up and the fiddle ceased, and we all retired for the night."

Prairie Postal Service

In the absence of radio, telegraph and mail facilities the traveler was entirely cut off from the world behind or ahead of him except as he might meet or be overtaken by passing emigrants. As a means of communication he contrived a system whereby messages were left by one group to be found by later ones.

Various writers describe the finding along the road side of deposits of newspapers left with the request that later emigrants read and return them to the deposit for others; notes were frequently written on scraps of paper and left by the trail telling later trains of the directions taken or progress made.

The lack of writing materials presented a problem.

With an abundance of buffalo or ox bones, the emigrant turned to them for use in "bone-writing."

"There were along the line of travel," says Mr. William Audley Maxwell, "many bare, bleached bones of animals that had died in previous years, many of them doubtless the animals of earlier emigrants. Some of these, as for example, the frontal or the jaw-bone, whitened by the elements, and having some plain, smooth surface, were excellent tablets for pencil writing. An emigrant desiring to communicate with another, or with a company, to the rear, would write the message on one of these bones and place the relic on a heap of stones by the road side, or suspend it in the branches of a sage bush, so conspicuously displayed that all coming after would see it and read. Those for general information, intended for all comers, were allowed to remain; others, after being read by the person addressed, were usually removed. Sometimes when passing such messages, placed by those ahead of us, we added postscripts to the bulletins, giving names and dates, for the edification of whomever might care to read them. It was in this way that some of the developments regarding the Indian situation were made known by one train to another."

Storms and Stampedes

The first part of the journey carried the travelers through a region like the already familiar Mississippi River Valley, but as the ox teams were urged steadily westward, the country by degrees assumed different natures. Prairies gave way to plains, and these in turn to higher plains, while farther still came the Rocky Mountains. There was no sharp line of demarkation between these areas, but higher altitudes and decreasing rainfall were noticeable. As the trail approached Fort Kearney on the Platte, or the high plains of Kansas or Texas, water became scarce;

grass was not so plentiful, except in the early part of the season, and trees were almost non-existent. Here the characteristic difficulties of the overland journey began to be manifest.

One feature of the region mentioned by many was the frequent occurrence of terrific thunder and hail storms.

"Storms of hailstones larger than hen's eggs," writes Gregg, "are not uncommon, frequently accompanied by the most tremendous hurricanes. The violence of the wind is sometimes so great that, as I have heard, two road-wagons were once capsized by one of these terrible thundergusts; the rain, at the same time, floating the plain to the depth of several inches. In short, I doubt if there is any known region out of the tropics, that can 'head' the great prairies in 'getting up' thunder-storms, combining so many of the elements of the awful and sublime."

"The wind blew, and it rained, hailed, thundered, and lightened in a way never before seen," records another writer. "The cattle refused to obey the drivers or face the storm, and turned directly about, and had to be well guarded by all their men to keep them from running away. The thunder crashed at our very heads, and the guards said the lightening circled the wagon tires and ran on the log chains. The men although in oil cloth suits, were pretty well drenched. We moved as soon as the storm abated sufficiently for the cattle to be made to face it. As the heavy clouds passed (though it continued to rain) Laramie Peak could be seen off to our left in the distance, with a halo of bright sunshine about its head and a storm (such as had visited us) raging on the lower slopes."

During these storms care had to be taken to secure the cattle and other live stock lest they be frightened off and lost. Losses of cattle were not, however, caused only by such storms, nor by theft of Indians which was an ever-

present possibility. Any unusual noise might spread alarm among the cattle. Josiah Gregg witnessed such a calamity:

"All of a sudden, about the ominous hour of midnight, a tremendous uproar was heard, which caused every man to start in terror from his blanket couch, with arms in hand. Some animal, it appeared, had taken fright at a dog, and by a sudden start, set all around him in violent motion; the panic spread simultaneously throughout the pen; and a scene of rattle, clash, and 'lumbering', ensued, which far surpassed everything we had yet witnessed. A general 'stampede' (*estampida*, as the Mexicans say) was the result. Notwithstanding the wagons were tightly bound together, wheel to wheel, with ropes or chains, and several stretched across the gaps at the corners of the *corral*, the oxen soon burst their way out; and though mostly yoked in pairs, they went scampering over the plains, as though Tam O'Shanter's 'cutty-sark' Nannie had been at their tails. All attempts to stop them were vain; for it would require 'Auld Clootie' himself to check the headway of a drove of oxen, when once thoroughly frightened."

Buffalo Hunt

The Great Plains were the natural home of the bison and emigrant trains were apt to encounter on their westward journey one or more great herds of these animals. A buffalo hunt was anticipated with much pleasure, as it would afford high excitement and also replenish the supply of fresh meat.

"The method of taking the buffalo," advised Hastings, "is either by approaching them unobserved, or by giving them chase, on horseback, and shooting them down as you pass them; the latter of which methods is, perhaps, preferable; and, hence, it is most generally adopted. In hunting the buffalo, emigrants are very liable to loose

their fleet horses, which after having been used a few times in the chase, with whatever timidity, they may have, at first, approached the buffalo, will, the moment buffalo are seen, evince the greatest anxiety to commence the chase; and, if restrained, in the least, they prance to and fro, under the steady restraint of the rider, or standing, they gnash the bit, and stamp and paw the ground, with all the wild ferocity, of those trained for the race course, or the battle field; and, unless perfectly secured, by being permanently tied or held, they dart away, and commence the chase without a rider. There have been numerous instances, upon the appearance of the buffalo, of their having broken loose in this manner, although saddled and permanently tied; and having commenced the chase at the top of their speed, until they arrived in the midst of the buffalo, when horses and buffalo together, leaped away over the vast plains, and were never seen or heard of afterwards."

There was also danger that a frightened buffalo herd would rush upon the emigrant company either in camp or on the march, with unfortunate results. Lemuel Clarke McKeeby in his *Memoirs* recalls such an incident on the banks of the Platte River in May of 1850. His party had made camp about four o'clock in the afternoon when suddenly a "drove of buffalo came charging towards the river; they come on like an avalanche with noise like thunder and with their rolling motion and in compact form, thousands in number, irresistible in their force, they dashed through the river without a halt in their motion and up the bank on our side of the river they passed through a camp not far from us, stampeding the horses and doing other damage; the horses that stampeded became perfectly crazed and ran as far as eye could see them; this means that that camp must be delayed several days to gather up their animals."

Indian Experiences

The Indians along the routes were objects of interest and concern to the emigrants. While at times they were very troublesome, many accounts remain of friendly intercourse with these wild people of the plains. Elisha Brooks, in relating the experiences of his mother, has this to say regarding the Indians:

"Convinced that they were not hostile we camped within a mile of their wigwams, and they swarmed about us all the evening trading and begging. Some of the squaws sat down and made us children each a pair of moccasins from buffalo hide, receiving in payment seven pins per pair. On comparing their pins they found that one had eight, so the rest all came back for another pin, which they got."

Mrs. Nancy Hunt in *By Ox Team to California* relates similar experiences with these people. She says:

"As soon as we went into camp, if any Indians were in hearing distance, they would come to see us. They climbed up and looked into our wagons with great curiosity; yes, and astonishment, too, when they saw the display of guns and ammunition we had. We always had these hanging rather artistically on the inside of the wagon cover, so they would be the first thing to attract the visitors' attention, and they always looked sober at sight of them. . . .

"Sometimes it was trying to notice how the Indians would act with things we gave them. For instance, on one occasion a big Indian and a pitiful little fellow begged food, and we gave each a plateful. The big fellow soon cleaned his plate and then took the little one's plate away from him, bringing a sorrowful look to the little face. When we showed our astonishment, he said by way of explanation, placing his hand upon his stomach, then pointing to his companion: 'Me heap big: him little belly!'

The little boy looked sorry, but did not cry—I surmise he was used to such treatment."

Some of the Indians who had sufficient contact with the whites, learned thereby a few English words which were not altogether of parlor variety. Delano gives interesting incidents of this kind:

"Near our halting place we saw a party of Digger Indians, and I went over to them. As I approached, they advanced, to meet me, offering their hands, and pronounced in good English, '*How de do*,' followed by 'Whoa haw!' They had picked up these few words from the emigrants, and pronounced words after us with surprising correctness. . . .

"An amusing story was told of Hudspeth's company, when crossing the mountains from Bear River. His guide took them by the shorter route from Bear River, avoiding Fort Hall. The Indians had mostly retired to the hills, but they had learned a few English words from the teamster's vocabulary. On Hudspeth's approach, they met him in the most cordial manner with, 'How de do—whoa haw! G-d d--n you!' It was in fact the most common language of the drivers. In short, the most profane swearing was the common dialect of a great majority of the emigrants, and the poor Indians only used it as a welcome to the whites. On another occasion a party were inquiring for a good camping ground. They were assured there was 'plenty of grass for the whoa haws, but no water for the G-d d--ns!'"

During the early stages of the emigration, the Digger Indians of Utah and Nevada were not hostile and were at times actually helpful to emigrant parties whose supply of provisions had run low. Edwin Bryant relates that his party found some of the natives' food entirely satisfactory.

"After dinner we were visited by three Indians. . . . We informed them of our wish to trade for meat. They

signified that they had none. Three females of middle age, miserably clad and ugly, soon made their appearance, bringing baskets containing a substance, which, upon examination, we ascertained to be service-berries, crushed to a *jam* and mixed with pulverized grasshoppers. This composition being dried in the sun until it becomes hard, is what may be called the 'fruit-cake' of these poor children of the desert. No doubt these women regarded it as one of the most acceptable offerings they could make to us. We purchased all they brought with them, paying them in darning-needles and other small articles, with which they were much pleased. The prejudice against the grasshopper 'fruit-cake' was strong at first, but it soon wore off, and none of the delicacy was thrown away or lost."

Not all experiences with the Indians along the trail were as pleasant as those just related. The great number of whites at first caused the red men to look on with awe, but as time passed they became more daring. The white man's horses, mules, and oxen caught the envious eye of the savage.

From the beginning the southern Indians, especially the Apaches and Mojaves, had caused trouble for the wandering parties of white fur traders and emigrants. James O. Pattie records several skirmishes with these tribes. On one occasion the Indians, seeking revenge for the loss of sixteen of their number, made a very fierce night attack upon the American trappers. Of this Pattie says:

"At about 11 o'clock this night they poured upon us a shower of arrows, by which they killed two men and wounded two more; and what was more provoking, fled so rapidly that we could not even give them a round. One of the slain was in bed with me. My own hunting shirt had two arrows in it, and my blanket was pinned fast to the ground by arrows. There were sixteen arrows dis-

charged into my bed. We extinguished our fires and slept no more that night."

The Apache Indians of the Southern Plains have always held a reputation as plunderers and murderers. Evidence of their destructive work was apparent on all sides to the emigrants who passed through what is now New Mexico and Arizona. On the northern trail the Shoshones and Pai-Utes were a factor to be reckoned with. This was particularly true after the Indians had become more accustomed to the white invaders, and especially when they found that the white man's power of resistance was low because of the hardships of the journey. There were many who believed that degenerate whites may have incited the Indians to some of their diabolical acts.

Because of the possibility of danger in the Indian Country, the overland companies found it important to exercise care at all times, to be ready on short notice to form an enclosure if necessary, and to guard the camp carefully against surprise attacks at night. A contemporary writer giving warning regarding the practices of the Indians has this to say of Indian subtlety:

"Being aware that, in human form, it would be dangerous to approach the encampment of white men, in the night, they change their forms, and approach in the form of an elk, or some other familiar animal; but they usually prefer the form of the elk, as it is the most common animal in those regions. In order to effect the requisite metamorphosis, to enable them to enter the camp of the whites, they prepare the hide of an elk, entire, retaining his ponderous horns, which being thus prepared, is placed upon one of the most daring braves, who proceeds to the encampment; and, upon all fours, moves about the camp, apparently feeding as he goes, until he observes the greatest space between the sentinals, when he passes on, elk like, among the horses. He now goes on, from horse to

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horse, cutting the ropes with which they are tied, until he has loosed a greater part of them, when he throws off his disguise, mounts a horse, and, with most hideous whoops and yells, unlike an elk, he soon puts the horses to flight, and the guard to a nonplus; and leaving all in the utmost confusion, he gallops swiftly away, closely pursuing his numerous, frightened prey, when, soon, he is joined by hundreds of his villainous comrades. With the precaution, however, of securing the horses properly, within the 'caral,' as before suggested, no danger whatever is to be apprehended from the elk, in human form. Another method, by which the Indians effect an entrance into the encampment by deceptive means, is, by drawing near to the camp, in various directions, and commencing a most tremendous howling, in precise imitation of wolves; and so perfect is the mimicry, that it is almost impossible to distinguish their howl from that of the real wolf. By this deceptive course, the sentinals are thrown off their guard; for as they hear what they suppose to be wolves, in almost every direction from the encampment, and that too, very near, they are naturally led to the conclusion, that there are no Indians in their vicinity, as wolves and Indians seldom occupy the same country together in harmony."

A Dusty Road

When the emigrants reached the arid plains and deserts during the middle summer new hardships began. The hot dusty trail was in itself a fearful trial of fortitude as may be seen in the word picture left by Mrs. Carpenter:

"Nine wagons ahead of us, each with from four to six yoke of oxen, dragging their feet along in the dust which was so light that it only needed a breath of air to set it floating in clouds. The air was so full of it, that our own oxen and driver were at times quite obscured. I put a

curtain across the front of the wagon & opened the cover in the back in an effort to get air in enough to breathe. People back in the states have no conception of a dusty road."

The Mirage

The parched wastes also furnished the proper setting for the mirage, which, although common in the arid lands, was new to those emigrants who were unaccustomed to desert life and through its tantalizing deception lured many from their way in search of water. This peculiar optical illusion is explained as the bending or distorting of light rays as they travel through atmospheres of different densities. This occurs only near the earth's surface and is due to excessive heat of the sun. Mirages may be either upon the sea or desert. Upon the deserts they usually, although not universally, give the appearance of bodies of water and are therefore most tantalizing to those suffering from thirst. Sometimes the image is inverted, but at other times merely magnified. Edwin Bryant has written a most interesting description of the phantom scenes he observed in the deserts of Utah and Nevada:

"The mirage, a beautiful phenomenon I have frequently mentioned as exhibiting itself upon our journey, here displayed its wonderful illusions, in a perfection and with a magnificence surpassing any presentation of the kind I had previously seen. Lakes, dotted with islands and bordered by groves of gently waving timber, whose tranquil and limpid waves reflected their sloping banks and the shady islets in their bosoms, lay spread out before us, inviting us, by their illusory temptations, to stray from our path and enjoy their cooling shades and refreshing waters. These fading away as we advanced, beautiful villas, adorned with edifices, decorated with all the ornaments of suburban architecture, and surrounded by gardens,

shaded walks, parks, and stately avenues, would succeed them, renewing the alluring invitation to repose, by enticing the vision with more than Calypsan enjoyments or Elysian pleasures. These melting from our view as those before, in another place a vast city, with countless columned edifices of marble whiteness and studded with domes, spires, and turreted towers, would rise upon the horizon of the plain, astonishing us with its stupendous grandeur and sublime magnificence. But it is in vain to attempt a description of these singular and extraordinary phenomena. Neither prose or poetry, nor the pencil of the artist can adequately portray their beauties. The whole distant view around, at this point, seemed like the creations of a sublime and gorgeous dream, or the effect of enchantment. I observed that where these appearances were presented in their most varied forms, and with the most vivid distinctness, the surface of the plain was broken, either by chasms hollowed out from the action of the winds, or by undulations formed of the drifting sands."

Later he describes a scene of different nature:

"I had dismounted from my mule, and turning it in with the caballada, was walking several rods in front of the party, in order to lead in a direct course to the point of our destination. Diagonally in front, to the right, our course being west, there appeared the figures of a number of men and horses, some fifteen or twenty. Some of these figures were mounted and others dismounted, and appeared to be marching on foot. Their faces and the heads of the horses were turned towards us, and at first they appeared as if they were rushing down upon us. Their apparent distance, judging from the horizon, was from three to five miles. But their size was not correspondent, for they seemed nearly as large as our own bodies, and consequently were of gigantic stature. At the first view

I supposed them to be a small party of Indians (probably the Utahs) marching from the opposite side of the plain. But this seemed to me scarcely probable, as no hunting or war party would be likely to take this route. I called to some of our party nearest to me to hasten forward, as there were men in front, coming towards us. Very soon the fifteen or twenty figures were multiplied into three or four hundred, and appeared to be marching forward with the greatest action and speed. I then conjectured that they might be Capt. Fremont and his party with others, from California, returning to the United States by this route, although they seemed to be too numerous even for this. I spoke to Brown, who was nearest to me, and asked him if he noticed the figures of men and horses in front? He answered that he did, and that he had observed the same appearances several times previously, but that they had disappeared, and he believed them to be optical illusions similar to the mirage. It was then, for the first time, so perfect was the deception, that I conjectured the probable fact that these figures were the reflection of our own images by the atmosphere, filled as it was with fine particles of crystallized matter, or by the distant horizon, covered by the same substance. This induced a more minute observation of the phenomenon, in order to detect the deception, if such it were. I noticed a single figure, apparently in front in advance of all the others, and was struck with its likeness to myself. Its motions, too, I thought, were the same as mine. To test the hypothesis above suggested, I wheeled suddenly around, at the same time stretching my arms out to their full length, and turning my face sidewise to notice the movements of this figure. It went through precisely the same motions. I then marched deliberately and with long strides several paces; the figure did the same. To test it more thoroughly, I repeated the experiment, and with the same result. The

fact then was clear. But it was more fully verified still, for the whole array of this numerous shadowy host in the course of an hour melted entirely away, and was no more seen. This phenomenon, however, explained and gave the history of the gigantic spectres which appeared and disappeared so mysteriously at an earlier hour of the day. The figures were our own shadows, produced and reproduced by the mirror-like composition impregnating the atmosphere and covering the plain. I cannot here more particularly explain or refer to the subject. But this phantom population, springing out of the ground, as it were, and arraying itself before us as we traversed this dreary and heaven-condemned waste, although we were entire convinced of the cause of the apparition, excited those superstitious emotions so natural to all mankind."

Loss of Animals

One very real peril of the desert region was the loss of draft animals. One emigrant of 1849 wrote:

"From Laramie grass began to fail for our stock, and the utmost diligence had to be used to sustain them. From thence after the first fifty miles, dead cattle and fragments of wagons come in sight, and as far as here [Green River], I have counted about one thousand wagons that have been burnt or otherwise disposed of on the road. Destruction seems to have been the prevailing emotion of everybody who had to leave anything on the trip. Wagons have been wontonly sacrificed without occasion by hundreds, being fired for the apparent purpose of preventing them being serviceable to anybody else, while hundreds have been used by piecemeal for fuel at nearly every camping ground by each successive train.

"From Deer Creek to the summit, the greatest amount of property has been thrown away. Along the banks of the North Platte to where the Sweetwater road turns off,

the amount of valuable property thrown away is astounding—iron, trunks, clothing, &c., lying strewed about to the value of at least fifty thousand dollars in about twenty miles. I have counted about five hundred dead oxen along the road, and only *three* mules.

"The reason of so many wagons having been disposed of, was the apparent necessity of *packing*, in order to insure a quick and certain transit to the mines; and people did not care for the loss of any personal goods, so they reached there."

Notwithstanding the need for utmost haste, emigrants were often forced to halt and send their stock miles from the trail for forage. Those who were latest along the route suffered most, because the grass had been closely cropped by earlier trains, or, having been reduced to tinder by the intense summer heat, had caught fire through carelessness of campers. Bayard Taylor records that one man deliberately set fire to the grass to delay those behind and thus give his own team advantage in the race for forage. Needless to say, when the emigrants discovered the offense and found the culprit, he was immediately dispatched.

Many stories were told of unfortunate emigrants who had lost their stock along the road. This was a frequent misfortune as the western end of the trail grew near. Delano tells of a man who started out with five yoke of cattle all of which died except three head. He was obliged to throw away his goods and to construct a cart from the fore wheels of his wagon. With these he finally succeeded in getting through. And later:

"We fell in company this afternoon with a poor fellow who was working his way to California on foot, his sole supplies being a small bag of flour on his back. His cattle had died, and he had bought a horse. This, too, had died, and with a lame leg and a cancer on his hand, he was

limping his way to that bourne which was to salve all his aches and pains—the valley of the Sacramento."

Fortunately the great suffering among the emigrants awakened a sympathetic response on the part of others who were in a position to help. The record of those noble souls who risked their fortunes and lives that they might relieve the suffering of others is worthy of a better pen. Delano gives a picture of a pathetic desert experience:

"When a few miles from Black Rock Spring," he says, "I came to a wagon, standing in the road, in which was seated a young woman, with a child. The little boy was crying for water, and the poor mother, with the tears running down her cheeks, was trying to pacify the little sufferer.

" 'Where is your husband?' I inquired, on going up.

" 'He has gone on with the cattle,' she replied, 'and to try to get us some water, but I think we shall die before he comes back. It seems as if I could not endure it much longer.' .

" 'Keep up a stout heart,' I returned, 'a few more miles will bring us in, and we shall be safe. I have a little water left; I am strong and can walk in—you are welcome to it.'

" 'God bless you—God bless you,' said she, grasping the flask eagerly, 'Here, my child—here is water!' and before she had tasted a drop herself, she gave her child nearly all, which was but little more than a teacupfull. Even in distress and misery, a mother's love is for her children, rather than for herself."

Relief Measures

Emigrants who survived the perils of the desert often returned to aid others less fortunate who had been unable to proceed. The greatest assistance came, however, from residents of California, who knew the dangers the emi-

grants were forced to undergo. Word reached the Californians during the summer of 1849 of the great number who were either already in need or were unprepared for the desert journey. Acting immediately upon this information, General P. F. Smith dispatched pack trains with army supplies across the mountains by all the known emigrant routes. Following this, public meetings were held in Sacramento, San Francisco, San José and elsewhere and large sums raised for relief purposes.

The timely aid thus rendered made it possible for most of the emigrants to cross the Sierra Nevada just before the snows began to fall. Major Rucker was placed in charge of the distribution of the supplies. Sending other officers by the shorter routes, he himself went out along the Lassen Trail.

Major Rucker found his task most difficult. The length of the trail and the desolate nature of the territory through which it passed reduced the emigrants to the verge of starvation. To all this were added the frequent hostile attacks of the Modoc Indians along Pit River. By heroic efforts Major Rucker was able to bring aid to the needy ones and help them to reach the California settlements, but not, however, until snow covered the trail across the ridge of the Sierra.

The migration of 1850 was also helped by supplies sent by philanthropic Californians and handled under the kindly supervision of William Waldo, Colonel Ralston and Major E. A. Sherman. Waldo and Ralston cared for the emigrants along the Humboldt River while Major Sherman took charge of those who were coming by the Gila Route. The generous spirit of the Californians may be judged from the fact that Major Sherman required some three hundred and fifty pack animals to carry the supplies sent out from the Southern California towns.

Pioneer Women

There is no praise too great for the brave women who set out on the long journey to accompany their husbands or to join them in their new home. Mrs. Eliza Farnham has left this portrait of one such woman:

"And there is an exquisite and touching story to be told some day of the unwearied devotion and faithfulness of another woman, who, . . . setting out an invalid from her home in Iowa, became—as her strong husband's will and energies failed under the tremendous sufferings of that terrible journey—the efficient caretaker of him and their three sons; yoked and unyoked the oxen, gathered fuel, cooked their food, and divided her scanty share, when their supplies were short, with those whose very veins she would have exhausted her own to fill, had it been necessary or possible.

"She drove the teams, hunted wood and water in men's boots and tattered clothing, and for months performed all the coarser offices that properly belong to the other sex, and reached her journey's end a gentle, soft-spoken woman, with manners as unsoiled by her hard experience, as truly feminine and sweet, as if the refinements and ease of the drawing-room had surrounded her, instead of the dreary horrors and coarse tasks of those dreadful months. One must love such a woman. When I think of her, I can appreciate the feelings which, in early times, exalted characters of such rare beauty to a place in the calendar. Reverence, love, and gratitude ought to flow freely from the hearts of her family toward her, as richly and freely as odor from the rose, or light from the sun."

Elisha Brooks in *A Pioneer Mother of California* has paid to his noble mother a touching tribute such as few are able to write. The husband and father, in poor health, had left with the emigration of 1850, the mother remain-

ing behind with six children. When letters reported that the father was doing well and had decided that he would make his home in California if only his family could join him, the mother immediately sold the home place and, loading all into a wagon, started "in search of the land of good health, more alluring to us than visions of gold."

Many were the troubles of a pioneer mother on the great trail, as may be seen from the account given by Brooks. "A picture lingers in my memory of us children all lying in a row on the ground in our tent, somewhere in Iowa, stricken with the measles, while six inches of snow covered all the ground and the trees were brilliant with icicles. A delay of a week to enjoy the measles put us on our feet again, and we drove on."

At the Missouri River the company of emigrants was disrupted and the teamster who had been engaged to drive the oxen refused to go farther because of the reports of Indian hostilities, but Eliza Brooks was not the kind to be dismayed. "Having nothing to look backward to, as all our hopes in life were in the West, and all our wealth in that wagon, our Mother, remembering Lot's wife, kept her eyes toward the sunset. After a week's delay making final preparation for the journey, and in waiting for the flood to subside, she crossed the river and pushed into the mysterious West, into the teeth of the unknown terrors —alone with her six little children."

In spite of innumerable hardships the mother and little ones pushed on westward until they were upon the Humboldt River. One by one their oxen had dropped by the wayside. Their goods had been discarded and a lighter wagon selected from the many found deserted by the trail. Their food supply was low and still the great desert lay between them and their goal. Brooks continues:

"After some weeks of feeble existence on half rations, or less, we camped one night not far from the sink of the

Humboldt, where we made our last cup of flour into flapjacks and ate our last slice of bacon, then lay down to a hungry sleep in a lone and joyless group, while our mother prayed as fervently as mortal ever prayed that the ravens might feed her children in the morning. No ravens came with the dawn, but they were on the way, although the flapping of their wings we could not hear. We made our breakfast on a few small fish that we had caught with a grasshopper-baited pin hook; then we hitched up our single remaining yoke of oxen, Old Brock and Nig, and crept on toward the sunset, conscious only of a vague determination to drag our bones as near to the land of promise as we might before despair should shut the gates against us.

"That afternoon, as we were creeping wearily on, and the children's hungry cry had been silenced from exhaustion, we saw a little way ahead that fabled solitary horseman, or rather a man on a mule, approaching us. As he drew near, something familiar about his form riveted our eyes upon him. He rode up and presently with a joyful cry we were in the arms of our father; and the most cheering of our mother's greetings was: 'Yes, the children are all here.' I have no words to tell you of our surprise and happiness at this meeting, and your imagination must picture the shock with which the father met his little family out in that desolation in the clutches of famine; but the shadow was lifted from our hearts and the rainbow of hope grew very large. He reinforced our team with his mule, replenished our exhausted stores, and we could smile again.

"In those days it took three or four months for a letter from the 'States' to reach the mines, so that when my father received the message that we were coming, we were probably hunting our stampeded team among the Shoshones. On receiving the word, he had mounted his

mule and started in all haste and with many misgivings to seek us, for he knew from his own experience the perils to which we were exposed. He had ridden from the Sacramento Valley, three hundred miles, alone on his mule, trusting to his rifle for food and the sky for shelter, but with his saddle bags full of beans and hard tack for the emergency he fully expected. As the road skirted both sides of the river, he had crossed from side to side, enquiring of every train for some tidings of his family, until at last he met those Good Samaritans who could tell him all our names and the spot where he might expect to meet us some ten days later if we were still jogging on—though they shook their heads ominously at this slender chance. His health was very much broken by the hardships and strain he had endured, so we boys continued to drive our team; but we knew that our travels were nearly ended and that a grave in the wilderness or our bones whitening on the desert sands were no longer among the probabilities."

Primitive Surgery

Accidents along the trail not infrequently led to disaster. The lack of experienced medical help was a very serious thing and often resulted in the loss of the life of the injured person. There were cases where some member of the caravan took upon himself the functions of surgeon and attempted to alleviate the suffering of the unfortunate victim. Gregg records the following incident of the trail:

"A few days before the caravan had reached this place, a Mr. Broadus, in attempting to draw his rifle from a wagon muzzle foremost, discharged its contents into his arm. The bone being dreadfully shattered, the unfortunate man was advised to submit to an amputation at once; otherwise, it being in the month of August, and excessively warm, mortification would soon ensue. But Broadus obstinately refused to consent to this course, till

death began to stare him in the face. By this time, however, the whole arm had become gangrened, some spots having already appeared above the place where the operation should have been performed. The invalid's case was therefore considered perfectly hopeless, and he was given up by all his comrades, who thought of little else than to consign him to the grave.

"But being unwilling to resign himself to the fate which appeared frowning over him, without a last effort, he obtained the consent of two or three of the party, who undertook to amputate his arm merely to gratify the wishes of the dying man; for in such a light they viewed him. Their only 'case of instruments' consisted of a handsaw, a butcher's knife and a large iron bolt. The teeth of the saw being considered too coarse, they went to work, and soon had a set of fine teeth filed on the back. The knife having been whetted keen, and the iron bolt laid upon the fire, they commenced the operation; and in less time than it takes to tell it, the arm was opened round to the bone, which was almost in an instant sawed off; and with the whizzing hot iron the whole stump was so effectually seared as to close the arteries completely. Bandages were now applied, and the company proceeded on their journey as though nothing had occurred. The arm commenced healing rapidly, and in a few weeks the patient was sound and well, and is perhaps still living, to bear witness to the superiority of the 'hot iron' over ligatures, in 'taking up' arteries."

Ravages of Cholera

Those who became ill upon the trail suffered greatly because of lack of either comfort or medical help, and the greatest loss of life on the Overland Trail was due to sickness. The emigrants were not far from the frontier when the cholera epidemic overtook them and did great havoc

in the camps of the covered wagons. It was especially bad in the Missouri River towns and those along the Gulf. Breaking out again during the emigration of 1850, it was even worse than it had been the previous year. A correspondent writing to a Missouri paper from the Platte River reported counting forty graves in sixty miles, and that a few miles west of Plum Creek they had seen three wagons in a company from St. Joseph, with only one man able to sit up. The company, originally numbering twelve, had suffered six deaths, four were even then dying of cholera, one had the measles and the other was worn out by fatigue. A week later he encountered a train in which sixteen out of seventeen were sick, and in two other trains all but one had died. He estimated that two hundred and fifty people had died within fifteen days along the distance he had covered.

A physician writing to one of the Missouri papers from the vicinity of Fort Laramie in the latter part of June, 1850, had this to report regarding conditions on the trail:

"When I wrote you last, I stated the health of emigrants to be remarkably good. Some few cases of cholera had been reported, but I myself had seen none. Since then, how changed the scene! The angel of death has spread his wings over our way, and breathed his pestiferous breath upon the unfortunate emigrant.

"Many a poor unfortunate youth, far from home and friends, has breathed his last on the desert air, and found a lonely grave by the way-side: around his dying couch, no kind friends gathered to soothe and comfort the last sad moments of life; but in an open wagon or tent, exposed to the stormy elements without, and the *miserable comforts within*, he bowed himself, with stubborn submission, to the will of his creator. I have seen the father stand by the bed of his dying son—the brother by his brother—the friend by his friend—with them were noth-

ing seen but the stern sympathy of man's nature; and I could look on with partial indifference. They had but met the fate which every one of us might hourly expect. But on one occasion it became my duty to pronounce the hopeless condition of a dying husband and father. At the crossing of Laramie fork I had been called to see a man who had with him his wife and seven children. His case I considered then almost desperate, but by close attention might have been saved. Several days after, I chanced to see him again. As I sat by his side with my finger on his sinking pulse, and heard in his throat the death-rattle, that most ominous sign to the physician of approaching dissolution, his wife, with a smothered groan, asked me to tell her precisely his condition, saying she wished to know the worst. I told her she should not flatter herself any longer with hope, but be prepared for the worst. I arose to leave the tent, and as I did so returned the fee I had received on a former occasion, and I let drop a tear in sympathy for her desolate and bereaved condition. God grant that I may not, on this trip, be called to perform such another duty.

"Most physicians along the road believe the disease which has prevailed among emigrants with such fatality, to be epidemic cholera. Of this I am somewhat incredulous. Certainly, local causes sufficient exist on the Platte to produce, if not the most violent forms of diarrhoea, to incite, at least, the most latent predisposition to cholera into unrestrained action. The entire Platte bottom is covered with saline matter, such as saltpetre, salaratus, &c. The springs are also strongly impregnated with sulfur, copper, &c., (I have used no analysis but that of taste). Add to this the first emigration-sunk wells in the bottom. Into these had accumulated the filth and scum which 30,000 persons had left along the road. The use of this filthy water, together with exposure and unwholesome diet, are

sufficient, in my opinion, to account for all the sickness which has occurred.

"On the north side of the Platte (Council Bluff road) where emigration was less and water better, not a single case occurred.

"Our company escaped almost entirely till we arrived here. We had at least no serious case. . . ."

This statement regarding the cause of the sickness agrees with that of others. One man writes that of the seven hundred "who now lie between here and the Missouri" nine tenths died of carelessness and lack of experience and cleanliness. There was not sufficient care regarding drinking water, and emigrants would drink stagnant water, from pools and wells, rather than the muddier running water of the River Platte. "The graves encircling these pools show the consequences."

The emigrants were not prepared to combat the ravages of the disease and so it made headway unimpeded. One writer tells of a whole family that had been taken except for one little girl who was brought through and cared for by strangers.

While reading the files of the San Francisco papers printed during the years of 1849 and 1850, the author came upon this item in an issue of the *Alta California* for March, 1850:

DIED

Near the Choctaw Nation, in April last, Mrs. Sarah Baxter, on her way to California with her husband and three children.

Near Soledad, Upper California, in November last, John Calvin Baxter, aged 17 years.

In Monterey, Upper California, in February last, Mr. Stephen Baxter, aged 37 years, husband of Sarah Baxter.

On the following day in the same place Sarah A. Baxter, aged 19 years.

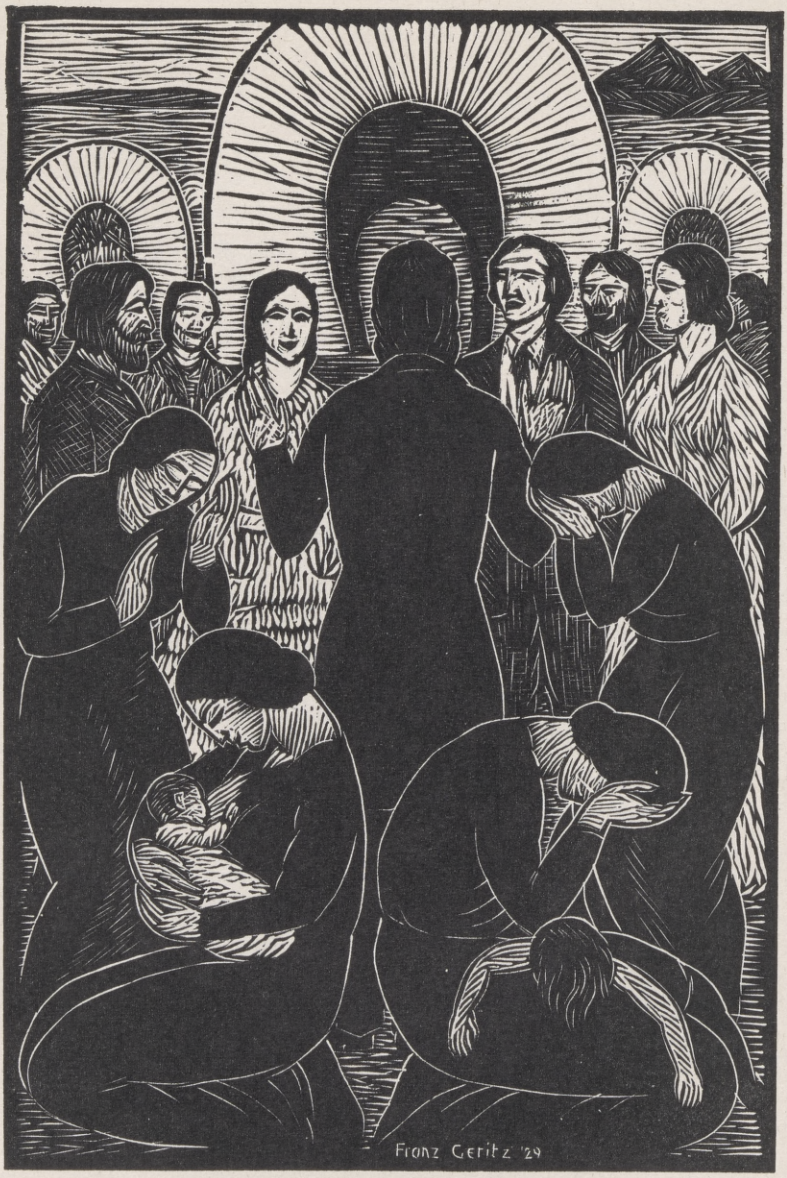
According to Hubert Howe Bancroft it was estimated that five thousand people perished from disease. The great mortality spread panic among the emigrants. Doctor Tompkins records that his company came upon a man who had been left by his companions to die. They gave him burial and placed a board with his name at the head of his grave.

A Cross-Section of Life

The experiences of the emigrants along the trail were as varied as life itself, for wherever there are humans there are also joys and disappointments, pain and pleasure. In the report of John Bidwell, who acted as one of the leaders of the first group of overland emigrants to California, is found this account of an incident indicating that the little blind god braved successfully the hardships of the Great Trek:

"Wonderful! this evening a new family was created! Isaac Halsey was married to Miss Williams daughter of R. Williams. The marriage ceremony was performed by the Rev. Pr. Williams, so we now have five families if we include a widow and child."

The stork was also to be found traveling with the Great Trek as evidenced by the large number of men and women now living who claim the distinction of being "Covered-Wagon Babies." Comparing the trying experiences of the overland journey to those of the present-day traveler, one wonders at the courage of the women who set out on the journey fully aware that ere they reached its end they would be called upon to take the grave responsibility of motherhood. Well equipped maternity homes were then unknown to the average mother, but out upon the plains and deserts not even the aid and advice of a physician could be expected. The following quotation from the contemporaneous diary of Cornelius Cox gives a graphic picture:


Franz Geritz '29

"At this place I met a Mr. Moss, originally from Ky & connexion. . . . I was much amused at a description that he gave of a frolic on the desert—One day about 1 O.C. when ten miles from water or grass—knee deep in sand, and exposed to the scorching sun—his wife, who was riding in the waggon suddenly complained of feeling *worse*. He says he knew there was h-ll to pay then, and no time for swapping knives—So he stoped the horses, took off his hat, rolled up his sleeves, got into the waggon and received from his affectionate wife another little Moss—in one hour everything was put to rights—and the waggon rolling ahead. He says it is the finest Boy they have and calls him California."

Edwin Bryant has left a description of the events of one evening on the trail which demonstrates most vividly that the experiences of the Great Trek were not unlike those to be encountered by the great body of emigrants along the Journey of Life.

"Between eight and nine o'clock in the evening," says Bryant, "I was invited to attend a wedding which was to take place in the encampment. The name of the bridegroom I did not learn, but the bride was a Miss Lard, a very pretty young lady, who, I doubt not, will be the ancestress of future statesmen and heroes on the shores of the Pacific. The wedding ceremonies were performed by the Rev. Mr. Cornwall, and took place in the tent of her father. The candles were not of wax nor very numerous, nor were the ornaments of the apartment very gorgeous or the bridal bed very voluptuous. The wedding-cake was not frosted with sugar, nor illustrated with matrimonial devices, after the manner of confectioners in the 'settlements'; but cake was handed round to the whole party present. There was no music or dancing on the occasion. The company separated soon after the ceremony was performed, leaving the happy pair to the enjoyment of their

connubial felicities. This was the first wedding in the wilderness, at which I had been a guest.

"After we left the bridal tent, in looking across the plain, I could see from the light of the torches and lanterns the funeral procession that was conveying the corpse of the little boy whom I saw expire, to his last resting-place, in this desolate wilderness. The faint glimmer of these lights, with a knowledge of the melancholy duties which those carrying them were performing, produced sensations of sadness and depression. While surveying this mournful funeral scene, a man arrived from another encampment about a mile and a half distant, and informed me that the wife of one of the emigrants had just been safely delivered of a son, and that there was, in consequence of this event, great rejoicing. I could not but reflect upon the singular concurrence of the events of the day. A death and funeral, a wedding and a birth, had occurred in this wilderness, within a diameter of two miles, and within two hours' time; and tomorrow, the places where these events had taken place, would be deserted and unmarked, except by the grave of the unfortunate boy deceased! Such are the dispensations of Providence!—such the checkered map of human suffering and human enjoyment."

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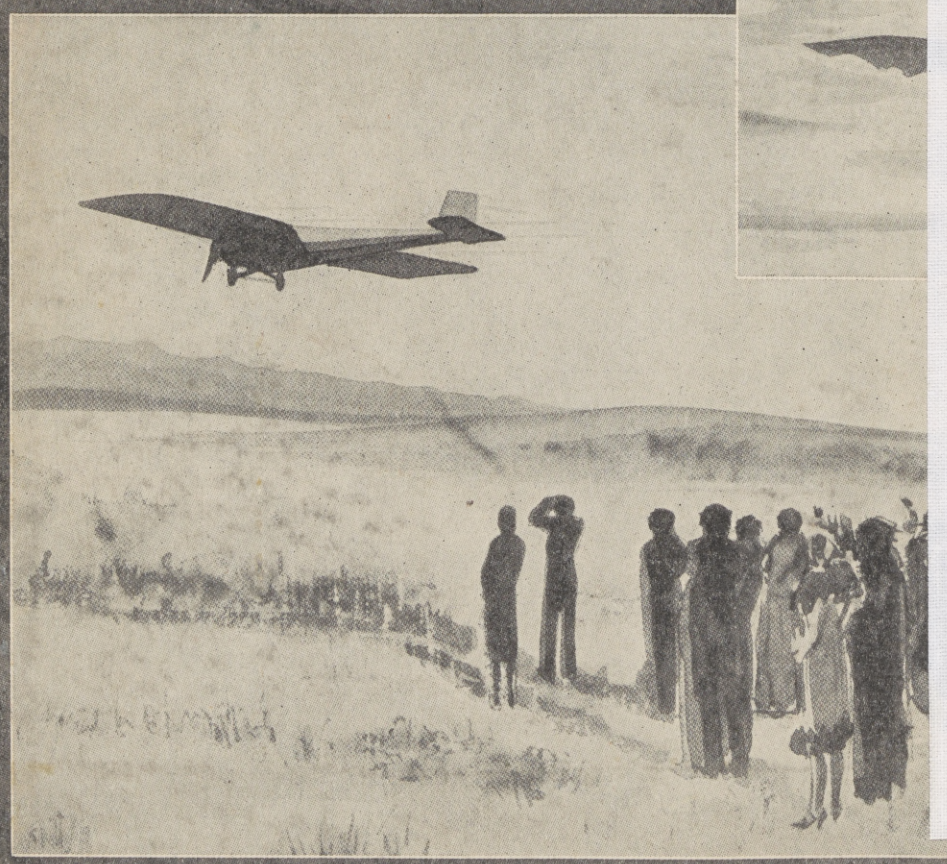

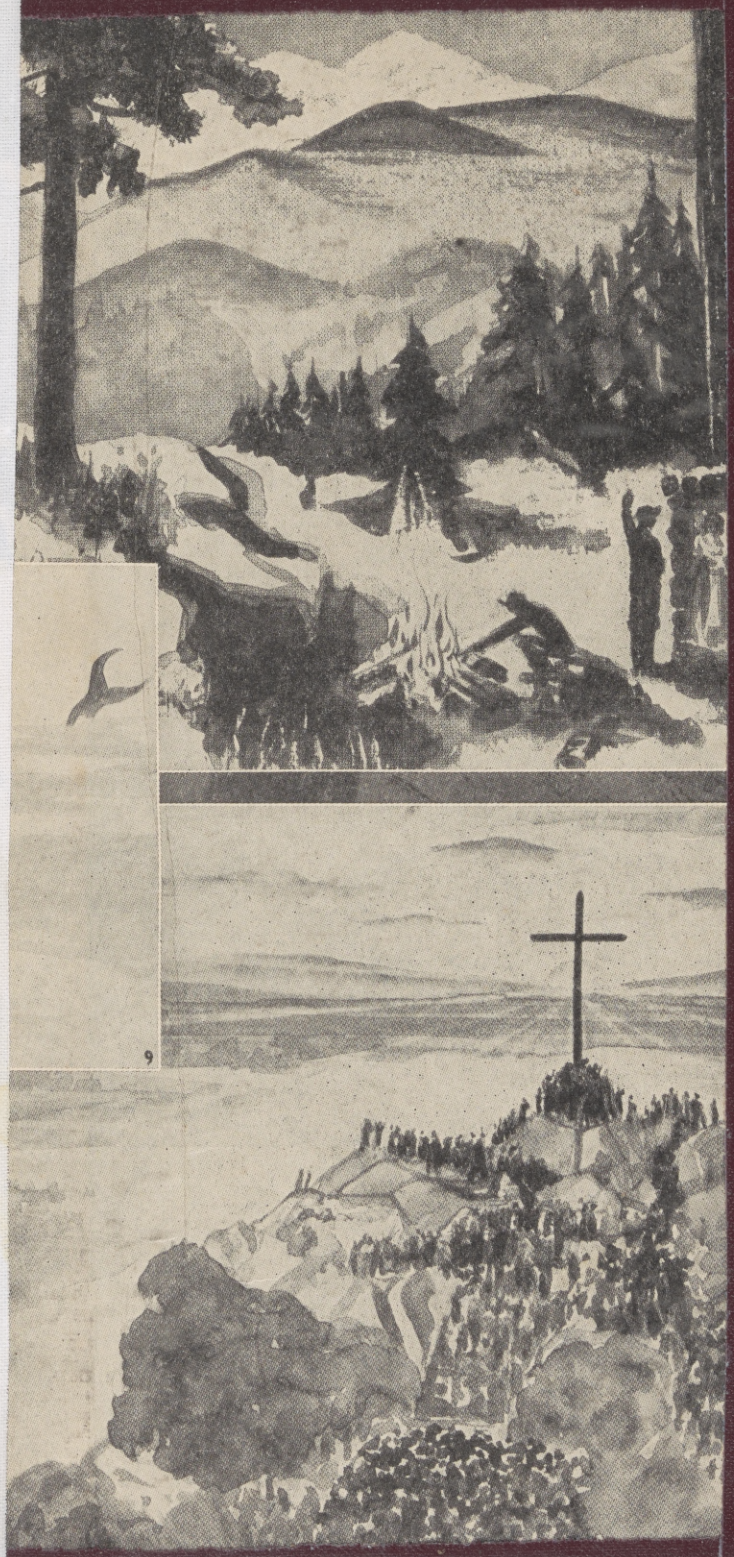

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